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From 'Sacred' to 'Secular'?

The Hermeneutical Future of Religion in the Thought of Gianni Vattimo and Charles Taylor

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From ‘Sacred’ to ‘Secular’?

**The Hermeneutical Future of Religion in the Thought of Gianni
Vattimo and Charles Taylor**

A Thesis Submitted

**In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

ROGI THOMAS

Supervisors

Prof. Nicholas Davey and Dr. Ashley Woodward



November 2018

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Abbreviations*

<i>BI</i>	- <i>Beyond Interpretation</i>
<i>B</i>	- <i>Belief</i>
<i>CV</i>	- <i>Caritas in Veritate</i>
<i>AC</i>	- <i>After Christianity</i>
<i>EM</i>	- <i>End of Modernity</i>
<i>NE</i>	- <i>Nihilism and Emancipation</i>
<i>NBG</i>	- <i>Not Being God: A Collaborative Autobiography</i>
<i>ADG</i>	- <i>After the Death of God</i>
<i>ACT</i>	- <i>Arts Claim to Truth</i>
<i>FT</i>	- <i>A Farewell to Truth</i>
<i>FR</i>	- <i>The Future of Religion</i>
<i>CTWF</i>	- <i>Christianity, Truth, and Weakening of Faith</i>
<i>PP1</i>	- <i>Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1</i>
<i>PP2</i>	- <i>Philosophy and Human Sciences: Phi- Papers 2</i>
<i>SS</i>	- <i>The Sources of the Self</i>
<i>PA</i>	- <i>Philosophical Arguments</i>
<i>CM</i>	- <i>A Catholic Modernity</i>
<i>EA</i>	- <i>The Ethics of Authenticity</i>
<i>MSI</i>	- <i>Modern Social Imaginaries</i>
<i>SA</i>	- <i>A Secular Age</i>
<i>DC</i>	- <i>Dilemmas and Connections</i>
<i>CWS</i>	- <i>Closed World Structures</i>
<i>AA</i>	- <i>Age of Authenticity</i>
<i>AR</i>	- <i>Ancient Regime</i>
<i>AM</i>	- <i>Age of Mobilisation</i>

* The principal works of Gianni Vattimo and Charles Taylor are cited within the text in these abbreviated forms.

Dedication

To

All My Friends in Scotland

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Tibi soli in gratia et in via ambulo

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Author Declaration

I hereby declare that I, Rogi Thomas, am the sole author of this thesis; that unless otherwise stated, all references cited have been consulted by me; that the work of which the thesis is a record has been done by me; and that this thesis has not, in whole or part, been previously accepted for a higher degree.

Signed:

Date:

Abstract

This thesis entitled “From ‘Sacred’ to ‘Secular’? The Hermeneutical Future of Religion in the Thought of Gianni Vattimo and Charles Taylor” aims at a deconstructive analysis of religion and secularism in order to explore both its postmodern and post-secular implications. It suggests that Vattimo and Taylor’s philosophies of religion and secularism exemplify the key features of a defining feature of the post-modern world. Their discussion of ‘an emergent religious and cultural sensibility’ implies a post-modern, post-secular and hermeneutical re-affirmation of religion. Vattimo’s philosophy is presented as emerging from its own axiom of “weak thought” which is itself a secularising principle. By way of contrast, Taylor’s reflection on the foundation of secularity is delivered in four segments: 1) an historical approach to his concept of secularism, 2) his attempt at overcoming epistemology and its implications for understanding secularism, 3) a re-appraisal of his philosophical sources of secularity, and 4) the development of the concept of secularity commensurable with embracing a non-religious notion of religion.

The thesis entails a comparative and dialogical exchange between Vattimo and Taylor concerning their understanding of a post-secular engagement with religion. The thesis proposes that their dialogical engagement with secularism and religion articulates: 1) a process of hermeneutical reflexive re-evaluation, 2) a way of re-evaluating transcendentalism, and 3) a re-worked non-metaphysical notion of transcendence. In addition, this thesis suggests that their dialectical discourse on religion exploits the inexhaustible nature of religion, and its capacity to be more than itself. I shall argue that the philosophical outcome of their hermeneutical deconstruction of both religion and modern secularism (the two are intimately allied) will be presented as: 1) the development of a non-religious conception of religion, 2) a retrieved religion of being-for-the-other, 3) the precedence of charity over truth, and 4) an understanding of the transition from sacred to secular as a hermeneutical process of both ‘an exodus’ and ‘a transition’. This thesis offers a hermeneutical deconstruction of the ‘return of religion’. In so doing, it both engages and unfolds aspects of an ongoing philosophical and hermeneutical tradition. Although located primarily in the continental tradition of thought, the thesis is also concerned with responding to articulations of secular and religious dichotomies in other traditions in order to invigorate the re-thinking of religion and problems of secularity across a wide variety of philosophical horizons.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

“Hermeneutically speaking, there is always a ‘beyond’ to interpretation, that is, more interpretation. This is the principle of hermeneutic excess: no interpretation will exhaust the possible determinations of meaning within its chosen target subject-matter: there is always more to be said.” Nicholas Davey¹

This thesis entitled “From ‘Sacred’ to ‘Secular’? The Hermeneutical Future of Religion in the Thought of Gianni Vattimo and Charles Taylor” aims at a deconstructive analysis of religion and secularism and considers its postmodern and post-secular implications. It suggests that Vattimo and Taylor’s philosophy of religion and secularism are a defining feature of the post-modern world. ‘Post-secular’, and ‘post-modern’ in this context, suggest a transient condition or perspective which is the effect of or subsequent to the secular and the modern. In classical Western philosophical terms my thesis can be compared to ‘the dark night of the soul’ which articulates the most fundamental and problematic relationship between the individual self and the transcendent reality. This reality is discussed both in classical and contemporary philosophical terms and in relation to environmental concerns. Both Vattimo and Taylor address this particular philosophical thought in their own diverse ways, dialectic (Vattimo) or historical (Taylor). Their hermeneutics regarding re-articulation of problems of faith and skepticism lead to the affirmation of transformational relationships and post-modern re-engagement of religion.

The basic questions addressed are: (1) does the secularism of Vattimo and Taylor open the possibility of a new non-metaphysical re-orientation towards transcendence and any associated ethics? (2) Is the emergence of modern secularism incompatible with

¹ Nicholas Davey, “Praxis and the Impossibility of Hermeneutics? Reflections on Vattimo’s *Beyond Interpretation* and “The Future of Hermeneutics””, in *Trópos: Rivista Di Ermeneutia E Critica Filosofica Diretta da Gianni Vattimo e Gaetano Chiurazzi*, ed., Gaetano Chiurazzi, Anno IX, Numero 1, 2016, pp. 25-44.

an orientation towards transcendence and religious diversity? (3) Does modern secularism spell the death of conventional religion and ethics?

Vattimo and Taylor elucidate these questions in deep and profound ways. This thesis will both explore and compare the detailed analysis both thinkers undertake with regard to the philosophical and ethical emergence of modern secularism and how it leads to a hermeneutical re-engagement with the sacred. In exploring the consequences, I refer to Vattimo's proactive thinking with regard to Nietzsche's 'death of God'. This argument does not imply the negation of religious orientation but establishes through consequent secularism a new transformational religious experience. Taylor attempts to show historical evolution of the death of God that neither exhausts religious consciousness nor negates it, but offers a new direction to its appearance in post-modernity. My thesis attempts to argue that the historical and cultural critique of Christianity in its traditional idioms is a necessary route to its resurrection, but not as a return to an original form. Vattimo and Taylor create the conceptual space in which a new articulation of religious and Christian thinking can be undertaken. This space enables me to create a further development of secular thinking through my existential commitment to non-religious religion, a religion of being for the other and to charity taking precedence over truth. My position derives not only from Vattimo and Taylor's re-evaluation of secularism but also from the questions they raise.

I utilize two axioms to discuss the hermeneutics of 'secularism' and 'religion'. (1) 'The principle of hermeneutic excess', whereby no interpretation will exhaust the possible determinations of meaning within a chosen target subject matter, and (2) the principle of 'the language turn'.² As we shall see, Nietzsche's negation of God as the subject of apophantic statements unwittingly relocates the question of God within the *aletheic* function of language.

Religion as a social, philosophical, and hermeneutical category is central to Western consciousness. The dichotomous relationship between science and religion led Western culture into conflicting conceptual frameworks. Accordingly, religion's role

² Nicholas Davey, *Excerpts from a Seminar*, Hermeneutica Scotia, Dundee: University of Dundee, 2015. "Language turn" also is known as 'linguistic turn'. "Gadamer (following Heidegger) referred to it saying that being which can be understood is language, and what Derrida meant when he said there is nothing outside the textual systems we rely upon to make sense" (John D. Caputo, *Hermeneutics: Facts and Interpretation in the Age of Information*, Milton Keynes: Pelican Books, 2018, p. 146).

as a structural and institutional authority was challenged and weakened by science's questioning of the transcendent. The Enlightenment privileging of reason and its discrediting of metaphysics prompted philosophical theories such as positivist scientism, atheistic rationalism, Hegelianism and Marxist historicism. Nietzsche's 'death of God' and Heideggerian 'post-metaphysics' mounted a counter-Enlightenment enabling a new form of religious consciousness and practice. An unprecedented rebirth of religion became possible precisely because of the death of God, and the secularisation of the sacred. A hermeneutic of 'the return of religion' came to challenge the legacy of both the Enlightenment and modernity. "Neither secular modernity nor the decline of religious practice signalled the death knell for faith or belief; on the contrary, faith would always continue in a new social, cultural, linguistic, and philosophical context outside the orthodox religious pale and be subject to new and unprecedented influences."³ In post-secular and post-modern culture, faith and religion continues to exist because of the key paradigm shift mentioned above.

By examining the key arguments of Vattimo and Taylor, this research unveils the inexhaustible continuity, the hermeneutical possibility, and rich implications of the language turn for the interpretation of religion. The return of religion, and re-engaging with the sacred are events which renew the possibility of religious experience. Returned religion opens new semantic possibilities for terms such as community, faith, love, and God. Religion becomes a hermeneutical post-secularity realised as a happening (an event) of truth, and thus as a transformative practice.

Vattimo's theory of secularisation offers a post-modern revaluation of religion in post-metaphysical terms. His hermeneutical philosophy of 'weak thought' articulates a process of transition, weakening, overcoming, and beginning anew. Both 'the end of metaphysics' in Heidegger and 'the death of God' argument in Nietzsche form the background against which Vattimo develops his postmodern critique of religion and secularism. The story of weakening is essentially kenotic: a mirroring of the emptying of God the Father into his Son. For Vattimo, religion comes to its truth *via* acts of internal self-destruction/transcendence (or in Nietzsche's terms the 'will to truth' undoing itself). Vattimo's re-evaluation utilises both Heidegger's notion of *Verwindung* ('Being' as an *event*), and the kenotic dynamic in Christian thought, which

³ Enda McCaffrey, *The Return of Religion in France: From Democratisation to Postmetaphysics*, Nottingham: Nottingham Trent University, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 82.

dissolves itself in the form of *caritas*. Christian love and truth as ‘event’ are characterised by the reduction of metaphysical and sacral violence, and the weakening of strong structures. This historiographical knowledge of ‘weak thought’ is the result of the hermeneutical and emancipatory interaction between ‘Being’, language, and culture. Every act of knowledge is multi-dimensional: it is ontological, linguistic and cultural. Each unmasks the traditional structures of power and weakens them. Power moves from God to the religious community. The deconstruction of Western philosophy is therefore seen as a post-modern defence of Christianity in a secularised form. The key philosophical figure of thought here is the self-destructive and self-transcending principle of *caritas*, the principle which underwrites the continuous transformation of the Christian/philosophical tradition.

Taylor’s work represents not so much of a revaluation of religion, but its continuing historical evolution. It points to a suggestive rethinking of the relationship between religion and secularity. In his essay “Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism” he states, “we have a wrong model, which has a continuing hold on our minds. We think that secularism (or *laïcité*) has to do with the relation of the state and religion; whereas in fact it has to do with the (correct) response of the democratic state to diversity.”⁴ He claims that there is a need for a radical redefinition of secularism. His contribution to the formation of the modern-secular-self and tracing the genealogy of secularisation, is at the core of my research.

With the help of Taylor’s philosophy, this thesis attempts to re-think and re-invent the way we think and imagine ‘belief’ and ‘religious experience’. His theory of the overcoming (*Verwindung*) of traditional epistemology by ‘ontologising the disengaged’ by retrospective analysis is an attempt to trace and re-animate and extend the sources of secularity. He uses traditional epistemological claims in a deconstructive way. Taylor refers to these as a ‘closed world structure’. He reflexively posits a notion of ‘the self’ that undergoes an irreversible process of development culminating in the formation of ‘the secular self’. The self evolves and eventually leads to a shift from the enchanted (porous) to the disenchanted (buffered) sense. For Taylor, the Reformation provides the key to the historical moment concerning the formation of

⁴ Charles Taylor, Jürgen Habermas, Judith Butler and Cornel West, *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, eds., Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan Vanantwerpen, New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, p. 36.

‘the buffered self’. He sees the ‘immanent frame’ that operates within a disenchanted world as logically unavoidable, and as underpinning the power of the mainstream secularisation theory. Within this frame, each human is charged with finding his or her own way of being human (Nova Effect), and their own spiritual path. Thus, Taylor visualises the possibility of a ‘a leap of faith’ and ‘conversion’ within the ‘immanent frame’ which in itself is poised between closure and openness to transcendence. As we shall see, Taylor’s most important achievement is not to negate transcendence but to explain the possibility of the transcendent in terms of a hermeneutic of ‘secularity’.

Both Vattimo and Taylor propose that secular modernity is the result of religion, “but that religion has remained vital and unsurpassable, unassimilable, because our foundational concept of ‘the self’ has been made possible by (secularisation of) religion and in turn produces religious diversity. Or, in other words, by becoming secular, we also produce ever more diverse forms of experiencing religion...”⁵ Accordingly it can be stated that both Vattimo and Taylor’s deconstructive hermeneutics of religion leads to a ‘never-having-gone-away-character of religion’ which is itself the basis of post-secular age religious experience. Thus, Vattimo and Taylor show how the hermeneutics of interpretation has changed reality not by rejecting metaphysical and epistemological claims to certainty and truth but by demonstrating how their hermeneutics of *Verwindung*/secularisation/*kenosis* recovers the possibility of religious experience. Whereas, the recent revival of religion has been exhibited more in fundamentalist movements, and ethno-religious conflicts, the return of religion in contemporary philosophy is characterised at its core by a deep tolerance for difference and otherness.

Their dialectical conception of secularity and religion entails: 1) a process of reflexive re-evaluation, 2) a re-evaluation of transcendentalism, and 3) a retrieval of the notion of transcendence. In addition, their dialectical discourse on religion exploits the inexhaustible nature of religion, and its capacity to always be more than itself. In summary, this thesis defends the following: (1) thinking through the logic of secularity creates the conditions through which contemporary secularity be conceptualised and

⁵ Eduardo Mendieta, “Spiritual Politics and Post-Secular Authenticity: Foucault and Habermas on Post-Metaphysical Religion”, in *The Post-Secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society*, eds., Philip S. Gorski, David Kyuman Kim, John Torpey, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, New York: New York University Press, 2012, pp. 307-334.

can be transformed into new nuances through the secular narratives of Vattimo and Taylor. (2) Modern secularism gives rise to charity and is not incommensurable with transcendence but articulates it as a way of being open to the other. To this end, the thesis is divided into Four Parts consisting of Eight Chapters.

Part One Chapters One and Two outline: 1) the field of this research, its context, its scope and method, and the questions addressed, and 2) definitions of the concepts of ‘religion’ and ‘secularism’.

Part Two Chapters Three and Four present Vattimo’s philosophy of ‘weak thought’, and ‘secularisation’. 1) ‘Weak thought’ breaks down and overcomes the barriers of metaphysical and dogmatic objectivism (*Verwindung*). 2) Vattimo’s concept of ‘secularisation’ entails something more than the mere dissolution of the sacred. Rather, secularisation is a path retraced in reverse; a progress strived for, a process of *kenosis*, a realisation of the kenotic-charity.

Part Three Chapters Five and Six elucidate Taylor’s reflection on the ‘formation of modern secular self’ and ‘secularity’.⁶ These are surveyed in four segments: 1) the background to Charles Taylor’s concept of secularism, 2) his attempt at overcoming epistemology, 3) a re-appraisal of the sources of secularity, and 4) the development of ‘secularity’.ⁱⁱⁱ Taylor regards all four as a unified philosophical project.

Part Four Chapters Seven and Eight include, 1) both a comparative and dialogical exchange between Vattimo and Taylor, 2) reflections on how Vattimo and Taylor improve and advance on each other’s positions, and finally 3) a review of the four leading arguments of the thesis. They are, 1) the re-engagement of religion in order to envision a non-religious religion, 2) ‘the self’s’ realization of inevitable being-for-the-other, 3) Dogmatic conditions are replaced by charity taking precedence over truth. 4) The eventual prompting of a hermeneutic return of religion (from ‘sacred’ to ‘secular’) resulting in both ‘an exodus’ and ‘a transition’.

⁶ Secularityⁱⁱⁱ stands for Taylor’s unique interpretation of ‘secularity’ explained in Chapter Two.

PART – I

FIELD OF RESEARCH AND CENTRAL CONCEPTS

Introduction

The interrelated concepts of ‘religion’ and ‘the secular’ are increasingly prominent in philosophical discourse. The separation of the sacred and the secular as an epistemic and ontological dichotomy no longer holds philosophical currency. Religion’s reassigned place and renewed function in the public domain reveals a general logic that re-imagines religion’s discursive function. ‘Religion’ itself shifts relative to both a change of paradigms and historical events set in motion by secularism.

The re-imagined place of the divine, and the return of religion today leave one with neither a strong philosophical reason for atheism, nor with reason to dismiss religion as an evil. Accordingly, there are developing trends in contemporary philosophy which define and attempt a hermeneutical effort to re-imagine and recover the place of religion in society. Vattimo and Taylor’s⁷ exceptional philosophy of secularism sets in motion a hermeneutics of *Verwindung* which elucidates secularism not as the end of Christianity, not as a total church-state separation, and not as the complete retreat of religion from the public sphere, but as the latest expression of Christian religion itself. Vattimo and Taylor thus set the scene for a greater understanding of ‘the post secular’ and the ‘return of religion’. Vattimo suggests ‘a third way’ (which he calls ‘weak thought’) “contrary to the heavily metaphysical framework beneath the problem of

⁷ Along with Gianni Vattimo and Charles Taylor, those who currently argue for this approach include Rowan Williams, John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, Richard Kearney, Jens Zimmerman, and John Caputo. Rowan Williams envisions a transformational non-dogmatic faith that can capture the social, and imaginative world. Milbank attempts to recover an authentic and rational union of theology and philosophy, so that human beings can rediscover a vital, mysterious, and productive theological relationship to both God and the world. It reverses the decline of Christianity in public life by restoring the intellectual legitimacy of Christian theology over secularism. For Catherine Pickstock, “God exists by eternally expressing himself, and that even the simple and identically self-repeating non-identically repeats itself *ad infinitum* in the *Logos* (since the repeated divine unity is infinite)” (Catherine Pickstock, *Repetition and Identity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 196.) Richard Kearney makes an “anatheist” attempt to re-imagine the sacred. Jens Zimmermann’s philosophical hermeneutics and existential phenomenology argues for a religiously based humanism as a common ground between secular and religious thought. John Caputo’s ‘theo-poetics’ and ‘radical hermeneutics’ re-make God through imagination.

beginnings (first principle of Being), and contrary to a historicist metaphysics (in Hegel's sense- Being not as first principle, but as process)."⁸ Taylor in turn proposes a new sense of what is meant by the historical and genealogical shift to secularity in the modern West.

This thesis explores not only the deconstructive analysis of the concepts of the secular and religious, but also the 'post-secular' implications of the hermeneutic of *Verwindung* of both metaphysics (Vattimo) and epistemology (Taylor). For Vattimo, 'the post-secular re-imagining of religion' made possible by the hermeneutic of *Verwindung* is a participatory process in the fate of being and religious ontology. However, for Taylor, this 'post-secular re-imagining' is a phenomenon in which the individual self undergoes an historical evolution culminating in the 'secular self'. It also involves a revaluation of assumptions regarding 'the secular'. The *Verwindung* of Vattimo and Taylor seeks a new way of conceiving the relationship between religion and the secular.

In Chapter One, a systematic and logical clarification of 'the Field of Research' is provided. This concerns, 1) the context surrounding 'the title' of the thesis, 2) the important 'problems' prevalent in the philosophical and political circles concerning both the return of religion and the post-secular, 3) the philosophical method used, 4) the scope and objective of the research, and 5) the principal research questions this thesis addresses. The historical relevance of the concepts of religion and the secular are explained in Chapter Two in the context of Vattimo and Taylor's hermeneutics of secularism and religion. Special emphasis is given to the re-engagement of religion in Europe following the Enlightenment. Finally, special emphasis is given to the concept of 'secularism' in Vattimo and Taylor, which suggest the possibility of the emergence of a post-secular culture, and secular transcendence.

⁸ Gianni Vattimo, "Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought", in *Weak Thought*, Gianni Vattimo and Pier Aldo Rovatti, eds., and trans., Peter Carravetta, Albany: Sunny Publishers, 2012, pp. 39-52.

CHAPTER ONE

FIELD OF RESEARCH

1.1 Field of Research

One of the fundamental means of human self-expression is religion. Religion has undergone diverse genealogical and phenomenological changes and has generated a host of philosophical and sociological reflections. The Enlightenment critique of religion has induced a paradigm shift in how the presence of religion is imagined. As Charles Taylor observes that belief was unavoidable until the 1500's, whereas today religion has become one option among many others. Modernisation, rationalisation and functional differentiation has led religion to retreat from the spheres of institutional social life, with a growing disenchantment and, eventually, to the demise of religion itself.⁹

Consequent to the disenchantment and disappearance of religion from the 'public sphere,' a new philosophical, social, and political hermeneutic concerning 'the secular' arose in modernity. The secular emerges as an ontological category serving the spiritual, the metaphysical, and the sacred in 'this world'. Following the Enlightenment, Counter-Enlightenment thinkers and deconstructive thinkers tend to find 'secularism' and 'secularisation' progressive. In the development of post-modern and post-secular thought, "secularisation is understood as an increasingly complex plurality of belief, unbelief, and suspension between the two, along with other creedal commitments."¹⁰ Religion in post-secular culture is increasingly publicly manifested, propelled by global media, economic markets and foreign policies.¹¹

⁹ The principal attempt that Taylor makes in his *A Secular Age* is to challenge this account of religion in the West.

¹⁰ Michael Rectenwald, "Mid-Nineteenth-Century British Secularism and its Contemporary Post-Secular Implications", in *Global Secularisms in a Post-Secular Age*, eds., Michael Rectenwald, Rochelle Almeida, and George Levine, Boston: Walter de Gruyter Inc., 2015, pp. 43-64.

¹¹ Examples for 'religion in post-secular' culture can be, 1) different flourishing church communities in the USA, 2) many ethnic religious groups migrating to European countries and forming new communities that change the countries' demographic and cultural compositions, and 3) the traditional Muslim communities worldwide.

Accordingly, religion and secularism have become the subject of wide-ranging scholarship. The new interest in religion and public life, has provoked a critical response in academic and public debate. ‘The secular’ is no longer seen as an enemy of religion, but as the very essence of religion. Vattimo and Taylor explain ‘the secular’ as rooted within each religion, particularly Judeo-Christianity. The thesis will explore the hermeneutic promise of religiousness inherent in ‘the secular’. The mutual entailment of the secular and religion offers a paradigm in which religion is neither merely private, nor purely irrational. This is not a negative approach but involves an historical and nihilistic re-evaluation of traditional religious metaphysics.

1.2 Thesis, Problems, Methodology and Objectives

Thesis: This project, entitled “From ‘Sacred’ to ‘Secular’? The Hermeneutical Future of Religion in the Thought of Gianni Vattimo and Charles Taylor” aims at a deconstructive analysis of religion and secularism, and an explication of its post-secular implications. This thesis suggests that Vattimo’s theory of secularisation involves a paradoxical return to religion. This is a ‘qualified return’, and very much the outcome of Heidegger’s ‘the end of metaphysics’ argument and Nietzsche’s ‘death of God’. Secondly, my research proposes the need for a radical redefinition of secularism. Taylor argues in *A Secular Age*: “in any case, we are just at the beginning of a new age of religious searching whose outcome one cannot foresee” (SA, 534)¹². Analysing Taylor’s argument, this research maintains that a new form of religious sensitivity may have emerged in our time. This research culminates in the proposal that a new way of being religious is possible.

The integration of the secular and religious within a public sphere can pose diverse existential and ontological problems to the post-modern self. The following will be discussed.

Problems: 1) Post-secularism involves the paradox of being religious and yet not being religious, being secular and yet not being secular. If this can be so, does religion

¹² Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Harvard: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 534. Hereafter, this text will be cited as SA with corresponding page number.

once again take precedence over science and reason? Is humanity put under the spell of modernity itself?

2) Some thinkers suggest that “while religion seemed to be an ailing patient in the backwoods of historical development and evolution, it was in fact engaged in a worldwide revival tour.”¹³ Does the resurgence of religion point to de-secularisation? Does the post-secular return subvert the conventional narratives of both the ‘decline’ and the ‘privatisation’ of religion?

3) Understanding what religion entails grasping its historical context and observing its consequences in ethical and socio-political life. Is religious revival progressive? If so, does the return of religion compromise its position in a secular state?

4) Does Vattimo and Taylor’s philosophical celebration of historical genealogy do justice to a post-secular appropriation of religion? What is the ‘hinge’ or ‘the central epochal event’ that sets-in motion the recursive and circular movement of religion towards the secular?

5) Are the Reformation and the Enlightenment the only historical, philosophical and genealogical epochs that set-in motion the secular movement? What is the significant role that changing ‘social imaginaries’ play in this transformative evolution?

6) This research considers whether Vattimo’s concept of *caritas* can bridge the opposition between religious and political fanaticism? Does *caritas* lead everyone to be a ‘weak thinker’ who participates in the very contingency and ‘throw-ness’ of one’s own being, and able to recognise the ‘otherness’ of the ‘other?’

7) The principal aim of this thesis is to attempt a convalescing, a re-reading, re-interpretation and deconstruction of the problems raised regarding religion and the secular in the West. The answers to these questions are of paramount importance to the humanities. The outcome of this research suggests how academics might advance research to the end of transcending the hermeneutic of the secular-religious dichotomy. This would have the advantage of informing environmental policy making, healthy international relations, and the persistent issue of race and gender inequality.

¹³ Philip S. Gorski, David Kyuman Kim, John Tropey and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, “The Post-secular in Question”, in *The Post-secular in Question: Religion in the Contemporary Society*, eds., New York and London: The Society of Research Council and New York University Press, 2012, pp. 1-22.

Methodology: The principal method used in this research entails a mode of hermeneutic deconstruction which attempts to re-construct the secular and the religious. The re-evaluation of the secular and religious is not concerned with calculating any increase or decrease in the number (of believers) but with a form of hermeneutical restructuring where the secular as a category invokes the return of another category: the religious, without either being annihilated or over emphasised.

This deconstructive revaluation of ‘religion’ differs from conventional understanding of religious truth claims. The difference lies between epistemological claims to truth, and hermeneutical and evidential claims to truth and God. An epistemological proof of religious truth is beyond formulation but it can ‘truthfully’ be offered. This research does not make epistemological and metaphysical claims to truth, but offers a hermeneutical re-construction of the inter-relationship between religion and secularism.

Secondly, an historical method is used to approach the possible meaning of the concepts of ‘religion’ and ‘secularism’. The method focuses on analysing ‘secular self’ that evolves historically. It is not based on a descriptive *what*, nor on a chronological description of *when* and *where*, but highlights the analytical study of the unfolding story of secularism and religion concomitantly shapes post-secular culture. The research invokes a post-secular culture where religion and the secular are not dichotomous divergent dichotomy. This interpretive method allows us to consider possible future outcomes of the principal questions under discussion.

Thirdly, this work is not a comparative study between Vattimo and Taylor. The comparison of their thought is used as a tool to unearth the possible post-secular implications of the secular and religious. A dialogical exchange between them is attempted to suggest how each position might develop the other. The scope of this research is mostly limited to Western and American models of religion and secularism. However, references to other secular projects are included.

Finally, the basic data source consists in the primary works of Vattimo and Taylor. Chapters Three to Six form an in-depth analytical study of their conception of the secular and religious as post-modern and post-secular categories. However, to contest and contrast the views of Vattimo and Taylor, the thinking of Rowan Williams,

Richard Kearney, John Milbank, John D. Smith, with occasional references to Rajeev Bhargava, José Casanova, and Talal Asad are also introduced.

Objectives: 1) The hermeneutical, and existential objective of this research for contemporary society is the philosophical and ontological appropriation of the claim that “True Being never is, but sets itself on the path and sends itself, it trans-mits itself.”¹⁴ As Catherine Pickstock observes, the eternal God exists through his repetition, and repeats himself *ad infinitum* in the *Logos*.¹⁵ Therefore, the hermeneutic of Vattimo suggests that ‘Being’ is an ‘event’ which occurs, repeats, and appropriates to itself the dynamic of language and culture. ‘Being’ itself involves the process of transformation that leads to further transformations unendingly.

2) Vattimo and Taylor explain the secularisation of religion as a self-critical process, not as something static but as something evolving through stages of reflective self-re-appraisal. The proposed return of religion epistemically leads the believer through a self-critical process, where one finds oneself (1) in the ‘immanent frame’ and experiences the possibility of conversion and (2) discovers one’s own religious experience in the ‘otherness’ of the ‘other’.

3) Taylor and Vattimo’s philosophical vocabulary is used in this thesis to identify the tendency of religion to actualise transcendence in immanence. Following Nietzsche’s hermeneutic of the ‘will to truth’ Vattimo traces the self-interpretive truth of religion, which entails an internal self-deconstruction. In contrast, Taylor, rather like a positivist, is historical. His explanation of secularism begins with myth and fairytale followed by the Reformation, modern social imaginaries, the immanent frame, conversion and fullness. It is a re-recording of the historical evolution of religion. However, Vattimo is more concerned with the deconstructive dialectic of internal criticism.

4) Through their hermeneutic of secularism, Vattimo and Taylor help shape a vision of a world-historical progress from a deeply religious past to a secular but re-engaged religious future. Consequently, this research envisions contemporary philosophy contributing to thinking more subtly about the future of religion. This research presents religion as holistically universal and as the adaptation of cultures and languages, which

¹⁴ Gianni Vattimo, “Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought”, pp. 39-52.

¹⁵ Catherine Pickstock, *Repetition and Identity*, p. 194, 196.

goes beyond the sacred to the secular. The relative and pluralistic hermeneutic envisioned here is suggestive of a religion of being-for-the other that does not rely on metaphysical truth and vertical transcendence but on *kenosis* and *caritas*.

5) This thesis also argues that a postmodern philosophical perspective suggests that individuals practice their own post-modern version of ‘free-lance’ secular religion. This religion, having undergone the process of *Verwindung*/secularisation is not bound by dogmas and precepts but based on *kenosis* and *caritas*. Thus, in this post-onto-theological and post-secular epoch, it is possible to have a religious faith and experience without fixed precepts and most of all without an image of a metaphysical God. How this possibility arises is the subject of this thesis.

6) The deconstruction of religion and secularism does not lead to destruction per se but to a reconstruction and the rebuilding of religious belief (hermeneutically), and secular culture (in social imaginaries). This thesis attempts to set in motion a new interpretation of religion by taking recourse to Vattimo and Taylor. We exploit ‘the possibility of inexhaustible interpretation’ and ‘the language turn’ in continental philosophy. This sets aside and convalesces tradition (rather than abandoning it) and rethinks religion in a way that leads to its constructive re-evaluation.

1.3. Research Questions

Throughout the thesis, the following questions will be considered.

- 1) Do Vattimo and Taylor suggest a postmodern philosophical and onto-theological future in which individuals practice their own post-modern version of secular religion?
- 2) Is it an existential and onto-theological necessity that religions, especially the Hebrew-Christian revelation, undergo a dialogical and interpretive process of weakening?
- 3) Objective metaphysics has weakened through secularisation. Thus, (in this post-onto-theological and post-secular epoch), is it possible to have a religious experience without the image of a metaphysical God?

4) Can the constituent essence of religion reconstructed via ‘weak ontology’ (Vattimo) and ‘fullness and conversion’ (Taylor) be reduced entirely to the categories of *caritas* and *agape*?

5) Does the death of the metaphysical-moral God (Vattimo’s Nietzsche) and disenchantment (Webber’s Taylor) lead to the rise of new religious fundamentalism and re-enchantment (mystification)?

6) How does Vattimo argue that secularity is the outcome of Christianity and how does it posit the post-onto-theological religious experience of *caritas* as the result of *Verwindung*? How does Taylor’s work and especially *A Secular Age*, facilitate a plausible interpretation of secularism that helps to ‘break the spell of the immanent frame’ and accomplish ‘the conversion and fullness’ of religious experience? Guiding us through this material is the underlying question: How is it that the critique of religion displaces transcendence rather than rediscovers it within its own horizon?

Even if this thesis does not achieve a comprehensive answer to these questions, it will I hope, succeed in understanding their implications more comprehensively.

CHAPTER TWO

CENTRAL CONCEPTS

2.1 Vattimo and Taylor Re-engage the Concepts of Religion and Secularism

Vattimo and Taylor present their ideas of religion and secularism within certain categorical arguments. In this chapter, we present the key arguments of Vattimo and Taylor regarding religion and secularism. We are doing this in order to clearly identify the territory of secularism and religion that Vattimo and Taylor develop. It helps to understand the hermeneutical language both use. This will open the post-modern significance of their arguments. Finally, their unique hermeneutics are introduced.

Vattimo and Taylor attempt an ontological re-capturing and recovering of the meaning of religion and the secular. They regard religion and the secular as open historical structures. Religion and the secular are part of history but transcend historical structures. Taylor in his essay “Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism”¹⁶ states that a false model of secularism has a continuing hold on modern minds, especially regarding its relation to religion. Taylor feels the need for a radical redefinition of secularism. He uses the term ‘post-secular’ by which he does not mean a total reversal of the present scenario, i.e., an unwinding of what happened in Europe since the Enlightenment and Romanticism, rather it refers to a ‘time’ in which the hegemony of the main stream master narrative of secularism is increasingly challenged. Vattimo’s hermeneutical philosophy of ‘weak thought’ can be interpreted as a transition, weakening, overcoming, and a return. ‘The end of metaphysics’ in Heidegger and ‘the death of God’ in Nietzsche enable Vattimo’s postmodern interpretation of secularism and, thus, initiates the return of religion.

Peter Berger distinguishes three distinctive options regarding secularity. They are: (1) the reductive option; to interpret tradition in terms of modern secularity, (2) the deductive option; to reassert the authority of a religious tradition in the face of modern

¹⁶ Charles Taylor, “Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism”, in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, eds., M. Eduardo, and V. Jonathan, New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, pp. 34-59.

secularity, and (3) the inductive option which turns to experience as the ground of religious affirmation.¹⁷ These three options apply to Vattimo and Taylor's conception of secularity. They undertake a reductive re-interpretation of tradition in terms of modern secularity. They attempt a deductive reconstruction and reassert the place of religion in post-modernity. Finally, their own personal experience is used inductively as the principal tool in explaining the complex nature of secularity. Vattimo's nihilistic and Taylor's historical genealogical method are not anti-religious but rather continue and reconstruct tradition that aims at separating church from state.

Conventionally, Enlightenment thinkers imagined secularism as a framework of nonreligious ideas explicitly contrasted with religion. "To be a secularist in this sense, is to adopt a stance toward life that clearly separates a religious from a nonreligious way of being."¹⁸ For Taylor, this is a misleading 'subtraction story'. "Religion has not declined as much as expected. It is impossible simply to remove such a central dimension of culture."¹⁹ For Taylor, post-enlightenment people live in 'a secular age', in which most people make sense of things entirely or mainly in terms of this worldly-causality. In Taylor's phrase, they think entirely within the 'immanent frame'. It is a non-metaphysical, non-transcendent, knowledge which proves itself as sufficient to grasp a world that works entirely of itself. The 'immanent frame' is a normal, natural, tacit context for much or all of their actions.²⁰

Challenging Western secularism, Taylor offers three definitions. The first characterises secularism as the withdrawal of God and religion from 'public space'. This he calls 'secularity'. Taylor explains;

they (religion) have been allegedly emptied of God, or of any reference to ultimate reality. Or taken from another side, as we function in the various spheres of activity – economic, political, cultural, educational, professional, recreational – the norms and principles we follow, the deliberations we engage in, generally do not refer us to God or to any religious beliefs: the considerations we act on are internal to the "rationality" of each sphere – maximum gain within the economy, the greatest benefit to the greatest number in the political area, and so on (SA, 2).

In the second definition, secularity "consists in the falling off of religious belief and practice, in people turning away from God, and no longer going to Church" (SA, 2).

¹⁷ Gerard Dekker, Donald A. Luidens, and Rodger R. Rice, *Rethinking Secularisation: Reformed Reactions to Modernity*, London: University of America, Inc, 1997, p. 3.

¹⁸ Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*, eds., New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 8.

¹⁹ Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, p. 9.

²⁰ Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, p. 10.

Taylor calls this ‘secularityii’. This describes the condition of Western Europe from the early twentieth century. Third definition of secularism is more relevant to present day Western Europe. “This is a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace” (SA, 3).²¹ This is named ‘secularityiii’. This sets a paradigm shift: where once it was virtually impossible not to believe, faith and adherence to religion have now become optional. Taylor develops the far-reaching consequences of secularityiii, i.e., its need to redefine not only the role of religious hierarchy but its relation to the political regimes. In *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship*, Taylor observes that secularism entails a complex requirement. There is more than one virtue to be strived for i.e., liberty, equality and fraternity.²²

First, no one must be forced in the domain of religion, or basic belief. This is what is often defined as religious liberty including, of course, the freedom not to believe. This is what is also described as the ‘free exercise’ of religion, in the terms of the US First Amendment. Second, there must be equality between people of different faiths or basic belief; no religious outlook or (religious or areligious) *Weltanschauung*²³ can enjoy a privileged status, let alone be adopted as the official view of the state. Then, thirdly, all spiritual families must be heard, included in the ongoing process of determining what the society is about (its political identity), and how it is going to realise these goals (the exact regime of rights and privileges). This (stretching the point a little) is what corresponds to fraternity.²⁴

However, the three modes of secularity do not do away with but all refer to ‘religion’ as: 1) “that which is retreating in public space, 2) as a type of belief and practice which is or is not in regression, and 3) as a certain kind of belief or commitment whose current conditions in this age are being examined” (SA, 15). In ‘secularityiii’ God and religion are not alien to the present political and social scenario but remain an essential factor of these. Modernity is secular not because religion is removed, but because religion occupies a different place, compatible with the sense that all social action takes place in profane time.

²¹ Hereafter any reference to this definition will be cited as ‘secularityiii’.

²² Charles Taylor, “Forward”, in *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship*, eds., Geoffrey Brahm Levey and Tariq Modood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. xi-xii.

²³ *Weltanschauung*, the German term for a ‘world-view’, that is, either the ‘philosophy of life’ adopted by a particular person or the more general outlook shared by people in a given period, <http://www.answers.com/topic/weltanschauung#ixzz1PcSP4YLS>, accessed on 22/05/2011.

²⁴ Charles Taylor, “Forward”, in *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship*, pp. xi-xii.

By contrast, Vattimo has a paradoxical understanding of the concept of secularism. In the commonplace definition, secularisation is a departure from Christianity. However, Vattimo's is a counter-intuitive position regarding the secular. For him, 'the death of God' dissolves the strong reasons to be an atheist. 'The death of God', is an announcement of the consummation of the nihilistic process, even if this process is constructed as indefinite to avoid posting a metaphysical nothing.²⁵ Vattimo, here relates secularisation to the essence of Christianity, while *caritas* is the limit of secularisation.²⁶ He frames his account of secularisation with the help of his 'weak thought' i.e., 'Being as weakening', and 'God's tendency for weakening'. For Vattimo, "philosophy can call the weakening that it discovers as the characteristic feature of the history of Being as secularisation in the broadest sense." (AC, 24)²⁷. Tracing the source and impetus of secularisation in Christianity, Matthew E. Harris referring to John 15:15²⁸ observes that the message of Jesus (the event of the incarnation) seems less important for Vattimo than Jesus' messages such as calling humans to be God's friends, not servants (B, 25).^{29, 30}

Vattimo's re-orientation of hermeneutical philosophy is founded on two axioms: 1) weak thought, and 2) secularisation. Based on 'weak thought', Vattimo re-reads René Girard's concept of the 'victim based mechanism' and 'the death of the violent natural God'. This presupposes the end of a metaphysical God and prepares for the rediscovery of a Christian God realised in the mystery of the incarnation (B, 41). It weakens 'Being' and secularises (*Verwindung*) the metaphysical claims of hierarchical religions. Vattimo sees the process of secularisation as the positive outcome of Jesus' own teaching, as the continuation and the desacralising of the Biblical message. In this way, Christianity in praxis finds its truth in a secularised form. Accordingly, Vattimo and Taylor open the possibility for the emergence of a post-secular culture.

²⁵ Matthew E. Harris, *Essays on Vattimo: Religion, Ethics and History of Ideas*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, p. 141.

²⁶ The concept of *caritas* is explained in Chapter Four.

²⁷ Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, trans., Luca D' Isanto, New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, p. 24. Hereafter this text will be cited as AC with corresponding page number.

²⁸ John's Gospel Chapter 15:15 reads, "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends..." (*The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version).

²⁹ Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*, trans., Luca D' Isanto and David Webb, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999, p. 25. Hereafter this text will be cited as B with corresponding page number.

³⁰ Matthew E. Harris, *Essays on Vattimo*, p. 145.

2.2 The Emergence of Post-Secular Culture

Traditionally, the decline of religious belief (secularisation) constituted the characteristic feature of modernity. However, many scholars argue that religion has not, after all, lost its societal and cultural relevance. Immigrant religions and alternative spiritualities exemplify the resilience of religion as a social and cultural force. Vattimo, Taylor, John Milbank, Rowan Williams, and Richard Kearney³¹ have conceptualised the ‘post-secular’³² and the place of religion in society. Interest in academia and politics concerning ‘the post-secular’ has broadened the current revival of religion and led to a re-imagination of social imaginaries. It is also related to religious and philosophical worries as to whether ‘the post-secular’ leads to a re-enchantment of ‘the dis-encharnted-self’. For Habermas, ‘the post-secular’ is due to ‘a change in consciousness’. He attributes the ‘change in consciousness’ to three phenomena: (1) global conflicts inspired by religious strife, (2) religion gaining influence within national spheres, and (3) immigration of ‘guest-workers’, and refugees.³³ Religion in a post-secular culture “claims a more conspicuous and public role in shaping legislation or determining social and political values, (and) poses renewed challenges.”³⁴ One of the primary aspects of this research is to answer the question of how best to understand the changing religious-political landscape as a consequence of post-secular culture. This philosophical inquiry into ‘the post-secular’ is focused in a study of the new forms and ways of looking at religion as a re-imagined and revitalised cultural force. The answer lies within the hermeneutics of Vattimo and Taylor.

Vincent Geoghegan argues that ‘post-secularism’ “is a polyvalent and contested term, signifying a scepticism and/or antagonism towards secularism. Post-secularism

³¹ I have chosen these thinkers because their philosophical views on secularism and religion, 1) have resemblance to that of Taylor and Vattimo, and 2) their philosophy contribute to a post-secular ‘re-engagement’ of religion.

³² However, these thinkers do not use the term ‘post-secular’ explicitly. ‘Post-secular’ is coined by Habermas.

³³ Jürgen Habermas, Tony Blair, and Régis Debray, “Secularism’s Crisis of Faith, Notes on Post-Secular Society”, in *FALL*, 2008, <http://www.staff.amu.edu.pl/~ewa/Habermas,%20Notes%20on%20Post-Secular%20Society.pdf>, accessed on 12/02/2017.

³⁴ Justine Champion, “Why the Enlightenment Still Matters Today”, November 2012, <https://www.gresham.ac.uk/lectures-and-events/why-the-enlightenment-still-matters-today>, accessed on 12/01/2017. For example, the French government has struggled with debates around the implementation of the 1905 law of *laïcité* amongst new Muslim communities. So also the wall of separation between church and state in the US has been subjected to repeated and ongoing legal challenge.

recognises the persistence or ‘resurgence’ of religion, (and) attempts to overcome the antimony of secularism/religion.”³⁵ Habermas coins the term post-secular to describe the continuous reassertion and nuanced manifestations of religion in the public sphere. His philosophical aim is to solve the tension between radical multiculturalism, which interprets secularism as freedom from religion, and radical secularism, which is often associated with the French model of *laïcité*.³⁶ In a post-secular society, citizens both religious and non-religious, engage in reciprocal deliberation.”³⁷ In short, for Habermas and Geoghen, the term ‘post-secular’ applies to ‘secularised societies’ (modern societies) in which religion emerges as a public influence, while the conventional secularist conviction that religion will disappear worldwide in the course of modernization is waning.

In this research, post-secular is read in line with ‘the return of religion’, which is often associated (erroneously!) with the rise of fundamentalism. Philosophically, the ‘post-secular turn’ entails a renewed interest in religion as a social and political force. Philosophical logic locates ‘the post-secular turn’ as participating in the general logic “that is often deployed as a discursive practice to mark a change of topic or theme, to announce a new programme or position.”³⁸ For Taylor, this is an historically inevitable ‘event’ whilst for Vattimo ‘the post-secular turn’ is experienced recursively in his return to the religion of his childhood. It is not a sudden increase in religiosity but a ‘new culture’ developed and grown, in tandem with a change in attitude. In its philosophical profundity, the change in attitude means not only “an increase in the meaningfulness of religion or a renewed attention to it, but a changed attitude by the secular state or in the public domain with respect to the continued existence of religious communities and the impulses that emerge from them.”³⁹ Here a transformative shift is involved with the states’ relationship to religion.

³⁵ Vincent Geoghegan, “Religious Narrative, Post-secular and Utopia,” in *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 3.2-3, 2000, pp. 205-224.

³⁶ Fatih Cicek, “Post-Secularism – Did Secularism and the Enlightenment Project Fail?” [http://www.academia.edu/10429810/ Post-secularism - Did Secularism and the Enlightenment project fail](http://www.academia.edu/10429810/Post-secularism_-_Did_Secularism_and_the_Enlightenment_project_fail), accessed on 11/01/2017.

³⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008, p. 131.

³⁸ Gregg Lambert, *Return Statements: The Return of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 6.

³⁹ Hent de Vries, “Introduction: Before, Around, and Beyond the Theologico-Political,” in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, eds., Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan, New York: Fordham University Press, 2006, pp. 1-90. (Hent de Vries quotes Hans Joas here from Hans Joas,

The term ‘post-secular’ remains muddled, and its precise meaning has still to be unveiled. For example, Muslim majority countries and most Eastern countries, including India, always maintained a religious allegiance. Rajeev Bhargava accordingly observes that “we in India have been always post-secular.”⁴⁰ Indian political secularism has never been anti-religious but upholds religious neutrality. In the French case, there is clear post-secular trend. Accordingly, the term describes a new era in which secularisation has ended and religion is re-emerging. The need for renewed religious dialogue has motivated this research. To this end, I have undertaken a deconstructive critique of the secular, and a reconstructive critique of religion with the help of Vattimo and Taylor.

Significantly, post-secular culture includes Taylor’s argument that secularity entails a new set of conditions in which both belief and unbelief occur. Vattimo calls for a post-secular ‘weak religion’ which draws insights from the hermeneutics of nihilism and avoids all absolute assertions and distances itself from dogmatic structures. As we shall see, post-secular culture envisioned by the hermeneutics of Taylor and Vattimo, re-imagines faith for the contemporary world. Secondly, post-secular religiosity supports cultural, linguistic, and political practices of pluralism. Finally, post-secular means neither ‘secular’ nor ‘religious’ but a co-habitation of both in mutual inclusivity. The plural and harmonious nature of both the religious and the secular is already well established in some countries. Former French President Nicholas Sarkozy comments, “rejecting a dialogue with religion would be a cultural and intellectual error. A positive secularism that debates, respects and includes, not a secularism that rejects”⁴¹ is needed.

2.3 Secularism: A Historical Context

The meaning and the implications of secularism are complex. Its meaning differs according to its various cultural, political and religious environments. “In its own history, secularism has always included a debate about whether the process was

Braucht der Mensch Religion? Über Erfahrungen der Selbsttranszendenz, Friburg in Breisgau: Herder, 2004, p. 124.)

⁴⁰ Rajeev Bhargava, “We (In India) Have Always Been Post-Secular,” in *Global Secularisms in a Post-Secular Age*, eds., Michael Rectenwald, Rochelle Almeida, and George Levine, Boston and Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015, pp. 109-136.

⁴¹ Jürgen Habermas, Tony Blair, and Régis Debray, “Secularism’s Crisis of Faith, notes on post-secular society” in *FALL*, 2008, accessed on 12/02/2017.

irreversible and progressing, or indeed whether any such a large-scale change was happening at all.”⁴² With the advance of the ‘reconstructive hermeneutics’ secularism’s status as an ‘article of faith’ in the West is called into question. According to Taylor, the unstable nature of secularism is because ideas, institutions, arts, and formulae for production, and living, ‘circulate’ among societies and civilizations that are very different in their historical roots and traditional forms. He gives the examples of democracy, and non-violence.⁴³ These do not just change but are modified, reinterpreted, and given new names wherever they are transposed. This is evident in the case of the ‘secular’. It occurs in many places but does not mean the same in each instance. It takes the form of a non-identical repetition in which there are always subtle differences in deployment.⁴⁴

Since secularism has developed in different contexts and from various traditions around the world, it is pluralistic in outlook. Its scope widens with “its association with ‘progress’ and modernity, its assertions of rationality and neutrality, its claims of exclusivity about public life, as well as how this doctrinal logic unfolds in various contexts.”⁴⁵ The pluralistic nature of secularism makes it an adaptable category.

Accordingly, the individual ‘self’ can be different aspects of the whole picture of secularism’s plurality, contingency, and adaptability. Taylor calls this a ‘grand narrative’ which as product of the Enlightenment involves the spread of modernization. Taylor and Vattimo advance their ‘circular’ and ‘travelling’ aspects of secularism. Taylor “argues that Western secularity should be understood as the result of a fundamental change in sensibility marked by disenchantment, or the systematic

⁴² Herbert De Vriese and Gary Gabor, *Rethinking Secularization: Philosophy and the Prophecy of a Secular Age*, eds., Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, pp. ix-x.

⁴³ Taylor observes that parliamentary democracy spread outwards from England, among other countries, to India; likewise, the practice of non-violent civil disobedience spread from its origins in the struggle for Indian independence to many other places, including the USA with Martin Luther King Jr. and civil rights movement, Manila in 1983, and the Velvet and Orange Revolutions of our time. (Charles Taylor, “Western Secularity”, in *Rethinking Secularism*, eds., Craig Calhoun Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 31-53.).

⁴⁴ Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*, p. 31.

⁴⁵ Michael Rectenwald and Rochelle Almeida, “Introduction” in *Global Secularisms in a Post-Secular Age*, eds., Michael Rectenwald, Rochelle Almeida, and George Levine, Berlin: CPI Books GmbH, Leck, 2015, pp.1-26.

repression of the ‘magical’ elements of religion.”⁴⁶ Vattimo envisions secularism as the result of the diffusion of God taking a ‘weak form’. For Taylor, the whole breadth of the historical context for this shift is a movement towards reform within Christianity. Secularism is the consequence of this ‘great dis-embedding’ and appears as a variant form of religion itself and can be interpreted as the last expression of Christian religion itself, and can be seen also as new spiritualism that derives from the death of secularism.

What form does this new secularism and Christianity take? Graeme Smith observes; “secularism is Christian ethics shorn of its doctrine. It is the ongoing commitment to do good, understood in traditional Christian terms, without a concern for the technicalities of the teachings of the Church...Secularism in the West is a new manifestation of Christianity, but one that is not immediately obvious because it lacks the usual scaffolding we associate with Christian religion.”⁴⁷ Smith suggests one of the principal arguments of this thesis: that secularism has Christianity as its core. Vattimo and Taylor, through their philosophical argument bring forth what was hidden in secularism until now.

There has been a paradigmatic change in secularisms meaning as a result of being critiqued by different disciplines. According to Ester Halman and de Moor; “secularism is the inevitable outcome of structural changes in society, due to the growing influence of rationalisation and individualism.”⁴⁸ The structural and cultural changes in the West are primarily the outcome of both the Reformation and the Enlightenment which functioned as a check on any sort of absolutism, religious bigotry, or fanaticism. As Gerard Dekker argues, the effects of secularisation are distinguishable: (1) on the individual level where there is a decline of religiosity among individuals, (2) on the societal level where there is a restriction on the range of influence of religion on society, and (3) on the institutional level where there is an

⁴⁶ Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*, p. 21.

⁴⁷ Graeme Smith, *A Short History of Secularism*, London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2008, pp.2-3.

⁴⁸ Gerard Dekker, Donald A. Luidens and Rodger R. Rice, *Rethinking Secularisation: Reformed Reactions to Modernity*, London: University of America, Inc, 1997, p. 1. Halman, and de Moor are quoted by these authors here. (Ester, Halman, and de Moor, 1993, p. 39).

adaptation of religion to society's values.⁴⁹ In the West, the concept of secularism is sometimes narrowed to the state-religion relationship.

José Casanova and Fatih Cicek disaggregate secularism into four different constituent categories:

(1) Politically, the term implies the removal of religious domination from the public sphere and political authority and the transferal of political functions and institutions from the church to that of state (de-sacralising of politics); (2) socially and entrepreneurially it suggests a this-worldly orientation and the supremacy of individual reason and science in constructing society (de-consecration of values); and (3) philosophically, the liberation of man from 'religious and metaphysical control over his reason, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols,'⁵⁰ and (4) an intellectual disenchantment from the magical image of the world through the theoretical mastery of nature with rationalization.⁵¹

The political, social, philosophical, and intellectual categories allow secularism to appear around the globe in different forms under different pretexts and contexts. According to Akeel Bilgrami, secularism consists in three principal stances. First, it is a stance to be taken about religion. Secondly, unlike secular and secularisation, secularism is quite specific- it is the name of a political doctrine. Finally, secularism as a stance regarding a religion that is restricted to politics, it is not a good in itself.⁵²

Any attempt to define 'secularism' further adds to the indistinctness of this concept. However, this indistinctness paves the way for new meanings to be explored. Yet, one cannot claim to have a fixed definition of the word. As the socio-politico-religious environments undergo transition, it is important to attribute different values to the secular. Thus, I emphasise that the meaning of secularism becomes pluralistic and is not fixed. Vattimo and Taylor's hermeneutic of secularism and religion further open the pluralistic nature of the secular. This constitutes an historical openness. Secularism

⁴⁹ Gerard Dekker, Donald A. Luidens and Rodger R. Rice, *Rethinking Secularisation: Reformed Reactions to Modernity*, p. 2.

⁵⁰ José Casanova and Fatih Cicek quote Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, 1965, p. 2.

⁵¹ José Casanova, and Fatih Cicek, "Post-Secularism-Did Secularism and the Enlightenment Project Fail?", http://www.academia.edu/10429810/Post-secularism_Did_Secularism_and_the_Enlightenment_project_fail, accessed on 22/02/2017.

⁵² Akeel Bilgrami, "Secularism: Its Content and Context," in *Boundaries of Toleration*, eds., Alfred Stephan and Charles Taylor, New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, pp. 79-81. Bilgrami observes that (1) the stance taken towards religion does not say anything specific or precise- yet it is an adversarial stance since surely secularism, in some sense, defines itself against religion. (2) It is a political doctrine to the extent that it takes a stance vis-s-vis religion, it does so only in the realm of the politics. (3) It seeks what is conceived, by those who favour it, to promote certain other moral and political goods, and these are goods that are intended to counter what are conceived as harms, either actual or potential. Thus, secularism as a political doctrine arose to repair what were perceived as damages that flowed from historical harms that were, in turn, perceived as owing, in some broad sense, to religion.

is open to new meanings and a wide range of elucidations. It is not only comprised of the religion-state separation but also includes equality among religions and, the irreligious sphere. Its pluralistic and historical nature allow secularism to appeal to ‘substantive values’,⁵³ either political, religious or cultural due to internal or external reasons. It is also vital to interpret the meaning of religion in the context of this research.

2.4 Interpreting Religion

Religion is an undefinable (Rosenzweig) and complex phenomenon. Nevertheless, there is a resurgence of religious forces whereby religion and belief have once more become driving forces in society. Religion is perceived by many “as a means of supplying what they see as a needed moral dimension to ‘secular-politics’ and ‘environmental concerns’.”⁵⁴ Notwithstanding, “the picture is complicated by the growth of fanaticism, by a suspicion amongst many that religion is a significant source of the world’s ills, and by a blanket denial by others of the legitimacy of non-religious approaches to life.”⁵⁵ Islamophobia and anti-Semitism once again pose serious social issues. Intra and inter-faith disputes and ethno-religious issues reshape societies in ways inconceivable. Distorted conclusions about the negative impact of religion produce anxiety, hatred, and fear of ‘the other’.⁵⁶ In such a climate, it is necessary to acknowledge the complexity of ‘religion’ in a manner that does not become a tool of oppression and hatred. This is why Vattimo and Taylor restructure the Enlightenment critique of religion. For them, what makes religion post-modern and post-secular is not its metaphysical or dogmatic nature, but self-critique.

The word religion “is derived from the Latin *religio* - meaning ‘what attaches or retains, moral bond, anxiety of self-consciousness, scruple’ - used by the Romans, before Jesus Christ, to indicate the worship of gods and demons. Cicero is quoted as

⁵³ According to Akeel Bigrami, ‘substantive values’ are those values that some hold as values while others do not (Akeel Bigrami, “Secularism: Its Content and Context,” p. 81).

⁵⁴ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Dr. Ed Kessler and Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss, “Preface,” in *Living with Difference: Community, Diversity, and the Common Good*, A Report of the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, Cambridge: The Wolf Institute, 2015.

⁵⁶ The concept of ‘the other’ is explained in Chapter Eight.

saying that it comes from *relegere* (to read again, to re-examine carefully, to gather)⁵⁷ the meaning of which is “to carefully consider the things related to the worship of gods.””⁵⁸ Religion can be described as a set of beliefs, feelings, dogmas and practices that define the relations between human beings and the sacred or divine. A given religion is accordingly, constituted by specific elements within a community of believers.

Clifford Geertz defines “religion as (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating concepts of a general order, (4) clothing these concepts with an aura of factuality.”⁵⁹ Robert N. Bellah observes that Geertz left out belief in the supernatural or transcendent. It would seem that ‘symbols’ are basic to all religions. As they are related to language, religion instrumentalises language. If language is essential to religion, it is also culture bound.⁶⁰ Giving primacy to the linguistic and moral dimension of religion, Emile Durkheim defines ‘religion’ as a scheme of ‘beliefs and practices’ which unite those who adhere to them in moral and cultural communion.⁶¹ For Durkheim, ‘sacred’ is something set apart or forbidden, a realm of the non-ordinary reality. However, Vattimo and Taylor criticise the notion of a ‘non-ordinary realm’ in opposition to daily life. This becomes one of the principal themes of this research.

Vattimo and Taylor’s hermeneutic of ‘re-engaging religion’ becomes possible, when religion is perceived as a ‘subject matter’ in Gadamer’s sense. ‘Subject matter’ is an embodied condition (Hegel), and is both conceptualised and practiced in social relationships, and language. More significantly, as a subject-matter it has the capacity to be otherwise. It is an interplay of actuality and potentiality. What is seen, is only a finite aspect of religion. Vattimo and Taylor try to unveil its more aspect. Hermeneutical deconstruction through ‘an inexhaustible interpretation’ and ‘the language turn’ are the philosophical frameworks with which both thinkers reveal how religion alters its modality constantly revaluating itself.

⁵⁷ Cicero’s definition is further examined in Chapter Eight when dealing with the ‘return of religion’.

⁵⁸ “What is religion” in <http://atheisme.free.fr/Religion/What-is-religion-1.htm>, accessed on 13/01/2017.

⁵⁹ Robert Bellah quotes Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, p. 90.

⁶⁰ Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From Palaeolithic to Axial Age*, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011, pp. xiv-xv.

⁶¹ Robert Bellah, p. 1.

The post-counter-Enlightenment hermeneutic of Vattimo and Taylor serves as an ontological aid to recapture the philosophical and cultural importance of religion. According to Taylor, it is possible that the disenchanted post-enlightened ‘individual-self’ ‘convert’ to different forms of religion and secular ideology. As Wayne Hudson remarks, “in the beginning of the third millennium there is a grudging admission that ‘religion’ is harder to eliminate than nineteenth century thinkers believed.”⁶² Consequently, we must elucidate the source of this emergent religion and secularism with the assistance of the Enlightenment critique itself.

2.5 The Enlightenment Critique of Religion and Immanuel Kant

The philosophical and cultural movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that stressed freedom of thought over dogma became known as the Enlightenment. Reactionary in character, the Enlightenment prompted a vital revision in the way religion had been thought of since the medieval period.⁶³ In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the German intellectual movement called *die Aufklärung* fused with the French *Siècle des Lumières*. For Knud Haakonssen, “the Enlightenment was first and foremost a movement to preserve civilised society against any resurgence of religious enthusiasm and superstition...”⁶⁴ For M. S. Recher, “the Enlightenment should be considered as one more exemplification of an intellectual and moral confrontation between religious and non-religious thought.”⁶⁵ This confrontation was the result of the development of scientific methodology which displaced faith and mysticism as keys to understanding the universe. Bound up with this antagonism was a profound disdain for the power of the church and its clergy. Of concern to many

⁶² Wayne Hudson, “The Enlightenment Critique of Religion,” in *Australian Journal of Theology* 5, August 2005, pp. 1-12.

⁶³ It should be noted that the word ‘religion’ was not in common use before the Enlightenment, while ‘faith’ and ‘sacred’ were used frequently. In its Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment use, religion as an ideological construct of beliefs joined with an institutionalised community unrelated to public life, makes sense only in juxtaposition to secularism. (Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerp, *Rethinking Secularism*, P. 7.)

⁶⁴ Knud Haakonssen, “Enlightened Dissent: An Introduction” in *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-century Britain*, ed., Knud Haakonssen, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 2.

⁶⁵ Mehmet Sait Reçber, *Religion after Enlightenment: the Case for Islam*, pp. 305-314. Published online: 22 Jun 2012, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2012.679035>, accessed on 12/01/2017.

Enlightenment thinkers was the need to find a new moral basis for social order without a specifically doctrinal religious justification.

In his book, *In Defence of the Enlightenment*, Tzvetan Todorov suggests “three values that permeate the core of the Enlightenment project: autonomy, universalism, and the principle of humanity.”⁶⁶ Autonomy requires that the individual should be able to make choices about their life. Universalism maintains that all people are deserving of dignity and share fundamental rights. The principle of humanity requires that the individual should organise the world according to what is best for human beings. This coincides with the development of a social imaginary:⁶⁷ the public sphere. “The gradual development and rise of the ‘public sphere’ entailed the dissemination of the written word, and the proliferation of venues at which ideas could be discussed.”⁶⁸ As we shall see, these factors eventually serve the re-valuation of religion as possible. Vattimo and Taylor provide an alternative thinking not by drawing a dichotomy between religion and polity but by developing a post-modern hermeneutic of pluralism and mutual collaboration that re-locates religion in society.

Though the Enlightenment was represented as the enemy of religion, it is more accurately characterised as being critical of various features of religion; superstition and supernaturalism. According to M. S. Reçber, “the criticism and revisionism suggested by at least some Enlightenment thinkers seems to have been aimed at a particular understanding of religion rather than at religion *per se*.”⁶⁹ In this way, the Enlightenment primarily aimed at purifying religion of its metaphysical heritage and transforming it into something more humanistic. The Enlightenment can no longer be conceived as a philosophical anti-religious movement. According to Daniel Brewer,

the Enlightenment designates not a past moment but a goal to be realized, a programme reflecting the desire to reform and regulate individual behaviour and collective social behaviours. Reformist, progressivist, and emancipatory, the Enlightenment project is fundamentally future-oriented, even to the point of seeming impossibly utopian. Rising up on a constantly receding horizon, it

⁶⁶ Matthew Taylor, “Twenty First Century Enlightenment,” in *SRA*, June 2010, p. 6, https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/reports/rsa_21centuryenlightenment_essay1_matthewtaylor.pdf, accessed on 12/01/2017. Matthew Taylor refers to Tzvetan Todorov, *In Defence of the Enlightenment*, Atlantic Books, 2009.

⁶⁷ The concept of the ‘Social Imaginary’ is explained in Chapter Five.

⁶⁸ SAGE, *21st Century Anthropology, A Reference Handbook*, SAGE Publications, 2010, p. 5.

⁶⁹ Mehmet Sait Reçber, *Religion after Enlightenment: The Case for Islam*, pp. 305-314.

represents a worthy goal, yet perhaps a constitutively and forever unrealizable one.⁷⁰

The Enlightenment was a ‘goal to be realised’. It was ‘future-oriented’. Vattimo and Taylor’s concept of ‘secularism’ re-reads the Enlightenment creation of a ‘science of ideas’ and ‘temples of reason’ and lifts them above the domain of any particular religious ideology or rationality.⁷¹ Vattimo and Taylor bridge the violent dichotomy between reason and religion. They struggle to bring out the positive potential of ‘the Enlightenment’ and to construct a notion of the ‘self’ that is a better believer and a better citizen.

Since the Enlightenment, the scientific reaction against religion has become more circumspect. There has been a call for a more individualised understanding of religion. This shift in understanding was initiated by Immanuel Kant’s response to the question of ‘What is Enlightenment?’ For Kant, “Enlightenment is mankind’s exit from self-incurred immaturity.”⁷² Kant defined ‘immaturity’ as,

the inability to make use of one’s own understanding and decision of an issue or subject without the guidance of another. Self-incurred is this inability if its cause lies not in the lack of understanding but rather in the lack of the resolution and the courage to use it without the guidance of another. *Sapere aude!* Have the courage to use your own understanding! is thus the motto of enlightenment.⁷³

For Charles Taylor, a ‘pre-enlightened self’ which he described as ‘a porous self’⁷⁴ was influenced by external forces. *Sapere aude*, the ability to use one’s own reason or daring to think for oneself puts an end to the self-incurred ‘immaturity’ of the ‘pre-enlightened-self’. Taken by itself, *sapere aude* is connected to the value placed on “the autonomy of rational individuals and the progressive function of the State for increasing collective well-being.”⁷⁵

Kant set asides traditional metaphysical theology but preserves a transcendental theology based on moral faith, for which God and immortality were necessary

⁷⁰ Daniel Brewer, “The Enlightenment Today”, in *The Cambridge Companion to the French Enlightenment*, ed., Daniel Brewer, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 1-2.

⁷¹ Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerp, *Rethinking Secularism*, p. 8.

⁷² Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy Series: The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, ed., Mary J. Gregor, Intro., Allen W. Wood, California: Stanford University, 1996, p. 58.

⁷³ Mehmet Sait Reçber, *Religion after Enlightenment: the Case for Islam*. Mehmet quotes Kant here from Kant’s *Practical Philosophy*, p. 58.

⁷⁴ The concept of the ‘porous self’ of Charles Taylor is explained in Chapter Five.

⁷⁵ Daniel Brewer, “The Enlightenment Today”, p. 1.

postulates of practical but not theoretical reason.⁷⁶ He was influential in developing ‘a philosophy of religion’ distinct from the ways both ancient and medieval thinkers dealt with the concept of God. Pre-Kantian scholarship was a ‘philosophical theology’.⁷⁷ ‘Philosophy of religion’, however, functioned independently from formal theological inquiry and shifted its focus from religion as divinely revealed to religion as a human phenomenon. It sought a philosophy of religion able to establish the scope of human reason, without divine revelation.⁷⁸

Kant shifted the focus from religion ‘as divinely revealed’ to ‘religion as a human phenomenon’.⁷⁹ The key elements of Kant’s shift concern the attributes of God which he discussed within the areas of rational psychology, cosmology, and rational theology. Kant’s significance lies in his attempt to see religion in terms of a symbolic (in contrast to a cognitive) field of human meaning, a field that “has been legitimated by the critically disciplined human reason...”⁸⁰ Kant’s philosophy of religion placed limits on the theoretical claims about God and Christian doctrine. For Kant, “the concept of God functions properly only as a “regulative”- limiting- principle in causal accounts of the spatio-temporal order of the world.”⁸¹ Such limits, according to Kant, serve to “exhibit the authentic religious meaning of the doctrines on God, i.e., their bearing upon the moral freedom of human agents and the moral destiny of the human species as the unique juncture of freedom and nature.”⁸²

Kant’s critical philosophy, i.e., his philosophy of religion, demolished dogmatic and pre-critical metaphysics, “but only in order to establish a metaphysics which was ‘transcendental’ in the sense derived from the universal architecture of human cognition.”⁸³ Hudson observes that “Kant defended a transcendental theology which posed no threat to scientific inquiry as it made no strong ontological claims about

⁷⁶ Mayne Hudson, “The Enlightenment Critique of Religion”, in *Australian Journal of Theology* 5, August 2005, 1-12.

⁷⁷ “‘Philosophical theology’ applied human reason to concepts and claims about God for which Christian theology, understood as a systematic human reflection on divine revelation, served as the primary frame of reference for the truth of such claims.” (Lawrence Pasternack and Philip Rossi, “Kant’s Philosophy of Religion,” in *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, ed., Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2014 Edition, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/kant-religion>, accessed on 13/01/2017.)

⁷⁸ Lawrence Pasternack and Philip Rossi, “Kant’s Philosophy of Religion.”

⁷⁹ Lawrence Pasternack and Philip Rossi, “Kant’s Philosophy of Religion.”

⁸⁰ Lawrence Pasternack and Philip Rossi, “Kant’s Philosophy of Religion.”

⁸¹ Lawrence Pasternack and Philip Rossi, “Kant’s Philosophy of Religion.”

⁸² Lawrence Pasternack and Philip Rossi, “Kant’s Philosophy of Religion.”

⁸³ Wayne Hudson, “The Enlightenment Critique of Religion”, pp. 1-12.

reality itself. It was open to challenge from a more historical approach which associated 'religion' with changes of ethical content and with forms of political, social and legal organisation."⁸⁴ The critique of Kant, and his understanding of 'religion' suggest how the Enlightenment was not merely a movement to attack the superstitious, dogmatic religion in the name of rationality. The important figures who advanced beyond the Enlightenment critique of religion were Lessing, Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, and finally Nietzsche. Vattimo and Taylor's distinctive post-Enlightenment paths lead to a contemporary analysis of secularity. For Taylor, the broader historical context for these shifts was a 'great dis-embedding'.⁸⁵ Although, the Enlightenment critique of religion promoted 'rational' and 'natural' religion, the proper place of religion in society remains philosophically controversial.

Vattimo and Taylor question the atheist opposition to religious belief. Vattimo argues for an atheistic Christianity based on atheism. He confessed that after a religious youth followed by a period of disenchantment, he experienced the paradox of recovering Christianity through Nietzsche and Heidegger. Taylor, however, argues that it is possible to think about the material world without reference to any transcendent power (a conception he calls 'the immanent frame').

2.7 Post-Enlightenment Religion and Secularism

The outcome of the Enlightenment were the humanising⁸⁶ ideas of autonomy, universalism, and progress. These gradually developed as the focus of a renewed public sphere. Consequently, the Enlightenment became the very cradle of modern Western secularism. As elucidated above, Kant's insistence on the importance of using one's own mind became a vehicle for secular trends. Subsequently, individual thought and reasoning became allied with sceptical inquiry and secular thought.⁸⁷ In essence, it was an "inevitable shift from the traditional to the modern, a transformation from religious superstition to the superiority of rationality; from a deeply hierarchical status-

⁸⁴ Wayne Hudson, "The Enlightenment Today", pp. 1-12.

⁸⁵ The term, 'great dis-embedding' is explained in Chapter Six

⁸⁶ 'Humanising ideas' stand for those values, norms, and lifestyles that delve into the collective consciousness of modern people. Tzvetan Todorov suggests three ideas that were core of the Enlightenment project: autonomy, universalism and progress.

⁸⁷ SAGE, *21st Century Anthropology, A Reference Handbook*.

based society to a rights-based society.”⁸⁸ According to José Casanova, the Enlightenment critique of religion became an independent carrier of the process of secularisation especially when established religious structures became an obstacle to human self-flourishing.⁸⁹

The term ‘secular’ derives from the Latin *saeculum* has a dual connotation: referring to ‘this time’ or ‘now present’ and ‘this world’ or ‘worldly’. “The existence of a sacred-profane division in Latin Christendom,”⁹⁰ can be characterised in terms of a horizontal and vertical division between ‘the other world’ (heaven) and ‘this world’. For José Casanova, this division was politically translated into the transcendental City of God and its ecclesiastical clerical embodiment on earth, and the City of Man.⁹¹ Secularisation became an historical process that challenged such horizontal and vertical divisions.

Nietzsche and Heidegger followed by Derrida, Foucault, Vattimo, and Virilio offer deconstructive commentaries or “a radically critical analysis of the social and intellectual practices common to the post-Enlightenment area.”⁹² The role of the Counter-Enlightenment thinker is to free ‘the other’ from the shackles of the illusions of secular reason. The ‘overcoming’ (*Verwindung*) of ‘metaphysics’ and ‘reason’, as we shall argue, leads to a renewed understanding of religion and secularism, not based on ‘reason’ but on hope and charity.

⁸⁸ Fatih Cicek, “Post-Secularism – Did Secularism and the Enlightenment Project Fail?”

⁸⁹ José Casanova, “Reply to Talal Asad,” in *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and his Interlocutors*, eds., David Scot, and Charles Hirschkind, California: Stanford University Press, 2006, pp. 12-30.

⁹⁰ Fatih Cicek, “Post-Secularism – Did Secularism and the Enlightenment Project Fail?”

⁹¹ José Casanova, “Reply to Talal Asad”, pp. 12-30.

⁹² Damon Linker, “From Kant to Schelling: Counter-enlightenment in the Name of Reason”, in *The Review of Metaphysics*, Arts and Humanities Database, 54,2; December 2000, pp. 337-377.

Conclusion

As stated above, this part of the thesis has outlined ‘the research field’ along with explaining ‘the concepts of religion’ and ‘historically contextualising secularism.’ The general presumption in the West is that ‘religion,’ and ‘secularism’ are two historical and phenomenological categories that cannot be easily theorised. Secularism became the epithet of modernity and democratic political states especially in the Western world. ‘Religion’ and ‘secularism’ are dichotomous terms whose philosophical and practical implications come into conflict. And yet, these distinguishable categories find a point of convergence. This research attempts to bridge their belligerent opposition. It attempts to ‘overcome’ the absolute truth claims of both religion and the secular. The question is how does the ‘truth’ of one finds its truth in relation to the truth of its other?

This research takes its principal source from the hermeneutic philosophies of Vattimo and Taylor. Taylor’s view of ‘a secular age’, and Vattimo’s account of secularisation as the outcome of Christianity open a new area of philosophical debate centering on the hermeneutical and post-onto-theological interpretation of secularism and religion. Why does Vattimo argue that secularity is the outcome of Christianity and why should it lead to a post-onto-theological religious experience of *caritas* as *Verwindung*? How does Taylor’s work facilitate an interpretation of secularism that ‘breaks the spell’ of the ‘immanent frame’ and accomplish ‘the conversion and fullness’ of religious experience? We shall argue that this deconstructive analysis of religion and secularism does not lead to a destruction but to a reconstruction of religious belief. It attempts to set in motion a new interpretation of religion. To this end, an analytical explanation of Vattimo and Taylor’s unique interpretation of religion and secularism are undertaken. In Part Two, I refer to Vattimo’s proactive thinking with regard to Nietzsche’s ‘death of God’. His argument does not imply the negation of religious orientation rather establishes through consequent secularism the possibility of a new transformational religious experience.

PART - II

TOWARDS SECULARISATION AS *KENOSIS*

“The twentieth century seemed to close with the end of the phenomenon that has been called secularisation.” Gianni Vattimo⁹³

Introduction

Gianni Vattimo has facilitated the re-definition of the role of post-Enlightenment philosophy and religion beyond the boundaries of the academic community. In so doing, he has re-affirmed the political and religious responsibility of philosophers in the post-modern world. He has attempted to improve both the reifying and constrictive thinking of Enlightenment positivism, and Hegelian-Marxist historicism. Vattimo rejects atheistic rationalism, i.e., the belief that experimental natural sciences have an exclusive claim to truth and that history is inherently progressive. This belief assigns a provisional place to religion in modernity: religion is an error destined to be dismissed by scientific rationality. Moreover, religious experience is considered a moment to be overcome by reason's self-unfolding towards a fuller and truer form of self-consciousness. However, in Vattimo and Taylor, both 'belief in the objective truth', and 'faith in the progress of reason' are unmasked by 'the disenchantment' of disenchantment with itself. 'Demythologizing' turns against itself, acknowledging that the ideal of the elimination of myth becomes *itself* a myth. Vattimo embodied and rearticulated this post-Enlightenment *Zeitgeist* formulating his own variant of critical hermeneutical philosophy. This transformative and hermeneutical process has been described as post-secular' analogous to the post-religious epoch that followed the Enlightenment.

Drawing cues from Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Gadamer, Vattimo offers a radical hermeneutical ontology. His principal contribution, the concept of 'weak thought' or

⁹³Vattimo, Gianni, "After Onto-theology: Philosophy between Science and Religion", in *Religion After Metaphysics*, Mark A. Wrathall, ed., Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2003, pp. 29-36.

‘the ontology of decline’, offers a lucid and far-reaching alternative to Derridean deconstruction and Deleuzo-Guattarian post-structuralism. He observes that philosophical deliberations change with both the appearance and disappearance of different cultures, languages, and philosophical trends. Through his hermeneutical weak thought, Vattimo underscores the impossibility of seeking universal and stable principles or values in philosophy. Aided by Nietzschean ‘nihilism’, he argues against the possibility of logical and epistemological justification for universal truth. Consequently, God, the most extreme hypothesis for humanity, and its foundational principle was required to die, and the world to become a fable, a game of interpretation. Both the ‘death of God’ and the fabulisation of the world, weakened the principle of reality which in turn yielded different images of the world and caused divergent interpretations. According to Heideggerian ‘nihilism’, the world of techno-science, the *Ge-Stell*, reduces Being to a realm of calculable and manipulable beings in which human beings become mere objects of analysis. Vattimo elaborates nihilism by defining his project as a ‘philosophy of actuality’ and by seeking a logical thread in nihilism that provides the means for an existential analysis of post-modern society. His hermeneutical project attempts to rescue philosophy and to re-recover religion from the nihilistic ‘net’ by salvaging the dimensions of positive nihilism. This transforming occurrence (*Ereigniss* or *event*) has an experiential character that is both interpretive and emancipatory.

Nietzsche’s ‘death of God’, Heidegger’s ‘end of metaphysics’, and a phenomenological re-appropriation of religious thought form the key to Vattimo’s philosophical deconstruction. His re-evaluation of religion by means of philosophical deconstruction and hermeneutical *Verwindung*, utilises ‘Being’ as an *event* and as the kenotic dynamic in Christian thought which dissolves itself in the form of *caritas*. Christian love and truth as ‘event’ is characterised by the reduction of metaphysical and sacral violence: it exhibits the weakening of strong structures. This historiographical knowledge of ‘weak thought’ is the result of the hermeneutical and emancipatory interaction between ‘Being’, language, and culture. Every act of knowledge is hermeneutical, and ‘Being’ is understood as language and history. Thus, Vattimo’s dialogical, non-foundationalist approach to continental philosophy unmasks the structures of power by overcoming of metaphysical claims. This deconstruction of Western philosophy entails a post-modern defence of Christianity in a secularised form.

In summary, Vattimo's re-orientation of hermeneutical philosophy in the light of nihilism is founded on two axioms: (1) Weak Thought, and (2) Secularisation.

Chapter Three develops 'weak thought' as an exhaustive philosophical outlook which breaks metaphysical and dogmatic objectivism. The evolutionary process of 'weak thought' is developed in three stages: (1) 'the death of God' and 'metaphysical violence', (2) 'a nihilistic vocation' and 'truth as an event' and (3) the 'weakening' of 'metaphysical dogmatism'.

Chapter Four explains Vattimo's concept of 'secularisation' as something more than the mere dissolution of the sacred, the estrangement from the divine, and the loss of religiosity. It is the path that is retraced in reverse; a progress strived for, a process of *kenosis* which seeks to recover a truth to the Biblical message. 'Weak thought' permits hermeneutical philosophy to rethink itself as the secularisation of the religious message of the West. Hermeneutics as the '*koiné*' of this post-modern epoch liberates religion from metaphysics and leads to an anti-essentialist account of religion based on kenotic-charity.

CHAPTER THREE

GIANNI VATTIMO'S CONCEPT OF 'WEAK THOUGHT'

3.1 Life and Influences

Frederiek Depoortere in *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy: Gianni Vattimo, René Girard, and Slavoj Žižek*,⁹⁴ suggests that the life of Gianni Vattimo is organised around three different but related concerns, 'politics, philosophy, and religion'. Beginning with religion, and the fervent Catholicism of his youth, Vattimo moved to politics and then on to philosophy. The failure of his engagement with politics and religion brought about a disillusion upon which he reflected philosophically. It was a seminal moment: it resulted in his return to religion but to a religion radically re-conceived. His intellectual and personal biography provides the context for any understanding or conceptualising of his philosophy of 'Weak Thought'.

The 'prodigal Vattimo'⁹⁵ was shaped by a critical and deconstructive approach to the concept of 'the return of religion'. According to the Enlightenment and positivist ideas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, religion appears as 'residual' forms of experience, destined to redundancy. Vattimo claims, however, that today religion appears as a possible guide for the future (B, 28). He takes his departure from Heidegger's and Nietzsche's notions of nihilism marking the end-point of modernity which brings with it the task of confronting the implications of the end of metaphysics. Arguments for 'the end of modernity' and 'the end of metaphysics' are elaborated in his books from the 1980's; *The Adventure of Difference*, *The End of Modernity*, and *The Transparent Society*. His thought characterises a 'journeying into difference' which defends a 'weak' interpretation of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Inspired by the work of René Girard,⁹⁶ Vattimo links the nihilistic vocation of 'Being' and Heidegger's theory of the history of 'Being' as 'the weakening of strong structures'.

⁹⁴ Frederiek Depoortere, *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy: Gianni Vattimo, René Girard, and Slavoj Žižek*, New York: T & T Clark, 2008, p. 3.

⁹⁵ I see Vattimo's return to religion as the prodigal son's return to Father's house.

⁹⁶ Vattimo read Girard's *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (trans., P. Gregory, London: Athlone Press, 1987), and *Violence and the Sacred* (trans., P. Gregory, London: Athlone Press, 1988). These books influenced Vattimo substantially in forming his notion of 'the weak thought'.

This is, as we will see below, involves what he calls the ‘transcription’ of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation (*B*, 33-36). The incarnation or the end of metaphysics dismantles the ‘natural sacred’ and opens a path to secularisation.

Vattimo has been influenced by different philosophers. Umberto Eco, Luigi Pareyson, Karl Löwith, Hans-Georg Gadamer, René Girard, Richard Rorty are the most prominent. Vattimo explains Heidegger and Nietzsche’s role in transforming his idea of modern thinking in *The Adventure of Difference*. He observes; “[It] is my conviction that Nietzsche and Heidegger have done more than any other thinkers currently within our cultural horizon to transform radically the whole idea of thinking, so that since them ‘to think’ has come to mean something different from what it meant before.”⁹⁷ The claim that ‘to think has come to mean something different from what it meant before’ is interpreted by Vattimo in relation to the Nietzschean problematic of ‘the eternal return’, ‘the death of God’, and the Heideggerian ‘overcoming of metaphysics’. Vattimo takes Heidegger’s ‘critique of humanism’ or Nietzsche’s announcement of an ‘accomplished nihilism’ as ‘positive’ moments in a philosophical reconstruction, rather than as symptoms of decadence (*EM*, 1)⁹⁸.

Vattimo in the *End of Modernity* explains how Nietzschean and Heideggerian ‘postmodern’ and ‘anti-Enlightenment’ thought positively and progressively made ‘weak thought’ possible. He explains, “[T]he ideas of Nietzsche and Heidegger, more than any other, offer us the chance to pass from a purely critical and negative description of the postmodern condition, typical of early twentieth century *Kulturkritik* (critique of civilization or culture) and its more recent offshoots, to an approach that treats the postmodern condition as positive possibility and opportunity” (*EM*, 11).

The distinctiveness of Vattimo depends on how he differs from, and progressively deconstructs, Nietzsche and Heidegger by introducing ‘weak thought’ and conjoining it with the notion of secularisation. Weak thought claims that this conjunction leads to a recovery of religious experience (Ricouer). In *Belief*, he declares that he prefers both to other thinkers because “their thesis, based on a given interpretation of their work,

⁹⁷ Gianni Vattimo, *The Adventure of Difference: Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger*, trans., Cyprian Blamires with the assistance of Thomas Harrison, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993, pp. 1-2.

⁹⁸ Gianni Vattimo, *End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*, trans., J. R. Synder, Oxford: Polity Press, 2002, p. 1. Hereafter this text will be cited as *EM* with corresponding page number.

seems to be above all in harmony with a specifically Christian religious substratum that has remained a living part of me” (B, 33). How does Vattimo develop his notion of ‘weak thought’?

3. 2 Evolution of ‘Weak Thought’

In *Belief*, Vattimo suggests that his Christian inspiration makes itself felt in his reading of Heidegger’s ‘being’ precisely in its characterisation as ‘weak’. *Il Pensiero debole* (weak thought) is an expression Vattimo used in an essay “Toward an Ontology of Decline” (1979). He claims that it has become the label of a “philosophical trend or (even) a school of thought, whose borders are even now uncertain”⁹⁹ (B, 34). Vattimo drew the phrase from an essay by Carlo Augusto Viano¹⁰⁰ and goes as to define it not as “the idea of thinking that is more aware of its own limits, that abandons its claims to global and metaphysical visions, but above all a theory of weakening as the constitutive character of Being in the epoch of the end of metaphysics” (B, 35).

The political and historical source of ‘weak thought’ is his *Il soggetto e la maschera: Nietzsche e il problema della liberazione*¹⁰¹ of 1974. This book became a political and philosophical manifesto for the democratic Left in Italy. However, his own students, some of whom were arrested for their Leninist activities misunderstood the book. The conceptual problem started for Vattimo when they wrote letters full of ‘metaphysical and violent rhetorical subjectivity’. Vattimo could not accept these either morally or philosophically. He came to the realisation that his “Nietzschean superman revolutionary subject” had been misinterpreted. Reading these ‘metaphysical’ letters made Vattimo realise that the ethical interpretation of nihilism and of Heidegger’s ontological difference created and justified ‘weak thought’. However, ‘weak thought’ came to life not out of fear of terrorism but as a response to the terrorist interpretation of Italy’s democratic Left.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Santiago Zabala, *Weakening Philosophy; Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo*, ed., London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007, p. 12.

¹⁰⁰ Carlo Augusto Viano “Reason, Abundance, and Belief,” in *Crisi delle ragione [The Crisis of Reason]*, ed., Aldo Giorgio Gargani, 1979, quoted by Santiago Zabala in *Weakening Philosophy*, p. 12.

¹⁰¹ The English translation of the book is *The Subject and I’s Mask: Nietzsche and the Problem of Liberation*, Milan: Fabbri Bompiani, 1974.

¹⁰² Santiago Zabala, pp. 12-13 and Frederiek Depoortere, pp. 6-7.

Vattimo links ‘weak thought’ with the rediscovery of Christianity. He was uncertain about his personal journey when he made the substantial link between Christianity and ‘weak thought’. It might have “happened in the wake of the experience of suffering, sickness and death of people who were dear to him...” (B, 36). He recalls René Girard’s work, *Of Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, which may have made this link possible. Vattimo further suggests; “the weak reading of Heidegger and the idea that the history of Being has, as a guiding thread, weakened the structures of the claimed peremptoriness of the real as given ‘there’ outside, was in effect nothing other but the transmission of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of God” (B, 36).

In *After the Death of God*, Vattimo enumerates a new hermeneutical nuance for weak thought. When the objective world consumes itself, it gives way to a growing subjective transmission not of individuals but of communities, cultures, sciences, and languages. Vattimo theorises this as weak thought,¹⁰³ as a going ‘beyond the oblivion of metaphysics’. Vattimo raises the concern; “to what extent does the weakening of the principle of reality that [...] occurs in the transition to post modernity, respond to the needs that inspire the effort to overcome metaphysics and modernity?”¹⁰⁴ His answer specifies the existential implications of ‘weak thought’ which supply philosophical reasons for preferring a more liberal, tolerant, and democratic society rather than an authoritarian and totalitarian one (NE, 19).

In his co-edited book *After the Death of God* (2007) John D. Caputo clarifies Vattimo’s ‘weak thought’. In the essay, ‘Spectral Hermeneutics: On the Weakening of God and the Theology of the Event’, Caputo states that Vattimo has described a two-sided process of weakening. “The [first] process is the weakening of Being, from an objective metaphysical structure into interpretation [‘event’ in the Heideggerian sense] or ...into the ‘world as a picture’...The second process is the weakening of God, which is described in Pauline language as emptying (*kenosis*)” (ADG, 17-18). The double processes of the weakening of Being and of God are the correlates of what Vattimo

¹⁰³ Gianni Vattimo and John D. Caputo, *After the Death of God*, ed., Jeffrey W. Robbins and forward by Gabriel Vahanian, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 40. Hereafter this text will be cited as ADG with corresponding page number.

¹⁰⁴ Gianni Vattimo, *Nihilism and Emancipation*, ed., Santiago Zabala, trans., William McCuaig and forward by Richard Rorty, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, p. 19. Hereafter this text will be cited as NE with corresponding page number.

calls ‘weak thought.’ I explain the evolution of the weak thought as a ‘going beyond’ of metaphysics and as the consequences of God’s death.

3.2.1 Violence and Metaphysics

Vattimo argues that the obligation of ‘the self’ in the present epoch is to reflect on the link between violence and metaphysics (AC, 113). This idea is attributed to Nietzsche and Heidegger as the imposition of destructive strength that is anticipated to cause destruction. Behaviour that ignores David Hume’s law tends to be violent.¹⁰⁵ Reflections by Theodor W. Adorno, and Emmanuel Levinas also explore the relation between metaphysics and violence.¹⁰⁶ “Metaphysics becomes a source of ‘violence’ when it claims to have reached *the* truth. In metaphysical thought, ‘truth’ is identified with immutable principles and axioms, and the certainty of the doubting *ego*. When truth becomes the possession of one human being, then it dangerously turns into a source of violence.”¹⁰⁷ Vattimo in *The Adventure of Difference* observes that the metaphysical tradition is a tradition of violent thinking.¹⁰⁸ (AD, 5). It is the belief that ‘one person’, ‘a system’ or authority has access to objective truth.

Vattimo argues in *After Christianity* that an awareness in the concept of violence might put an end to such violence. Violence, he claims, ultimately draws from the need, the

¹⁰⁵ “Hume’s Law, recalls, and refers to the observation...that it is not possible to move from the description of a natural behaviour to the assertion of a norm without presupposing another thesis (i.e., that what happens in nature is good in itself, [and all the resistance against this naturally oriented goodness is violence])” (A C, 114).

¹⁰⁶ “The atrocious actions carried out by Nazism in the first part of the twentieth century against numerous human beings considered as “inferior categories” help us to understand the risks that may hide behind the word “truth” as it is used in some contexts. Adorno and Levinas, who are qualified witnesses of what happened during the Nazi period, join in the refusal of metaphysics...Violence nests in metaphysical thinking and manifests itself in various ways, as “knowledge” organizing everything on the basis of a rational system where everything must be explained as well as through the “brutal conquest of beings through violence.”” (Silvia Benso and Brain Schroeder, *Between Nihilism and Politics: The Hermeneutics of Gianni Vattimo*, ed., Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010, p. 102.)

¹⁰⁷ Silvia Benso and Brain Schroeder, *Between Nihilism and Politics: The Hermeneutics of Gianni Vattimo*, p. 102.

¹⁰⁸ Gianni Vattimo, *The Adventure of Difference: Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger*, trans., Cyprian Blamires with assistance of Thomas Harrison, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993, p. 5. Hereafter this text will be cited as AD with corresponding page number. Vattimo explains, “All the categories of metaphysics are violent categories: Being and its attributes, the ‘first’ cause, man as ‘responsible’, and even the will to power, if that is read metaphysically as affirmation or as the assumption of power over the world.” (AC, 115)

resolve, and the desire to reach and be taken up into the first principle (AC, 117). Through an intricate complex chain of influences, metaphysical violence deeply influences many of the more controversial aspects of 'Christian Morality'.¹⁰⁹ For example, the idea of natural rights grounded in the idea of a 'natural' brotherhood of men had the historical function of diminishing the violence of extreme cultural fragmentation.¹¹⁰ "This transformation is bound up with the same principle that, according to Heidegger, has put an end to metaphysics: the fact of its becoming, from the ideal prefigureations of reality's rationalisation, an effective law for the functioning of the rational world of technology and the power grounded in it" (AC, 115). Therefore, violence in Christianity maintains its link to metaphysics.¹¹¹ This 'unholy' alliance of Christianity with metaphysics as the 'science of 'Being' is a key reason for violence entering Christianity. Vattimo suggests two reasons for this: (1) "the responsibilities that the Church inherited as the only remaining temporal power after the dissolution of the Roman Empire", and (2) "the identification of Christian existence with classical philosophical existence: the human being can realise humanity fully by raising it to a knowledge of first principles"¹¹² (AC, 117, and AC, 114-117).

With the help of Nietzsche and Heidegger, Vattimo looks to 'overcome' the vicious circle of the violence within metaphysics. He agrees with Heidegger that it is not possible to 'overcome' metaphysics or to abolish it by conceiving of it merely as a matter of opinion. Notwithstanding the inability to 'overcome' the violence of metaphysics in a radical manner, Vattimo depends on Heidegger to find a solution. He advances the theory of weakening, suggesting that "Being has to be sought outside of the metaphysics of objectivity precisely for ethical reasons, and the latter must guide us in our elaboration of the consequences of a non-metaphysical conception of 'Being'

¹⁰⁹ Vattimo gives the examples of the 'blessing' of sexuality in marriage, which grants that institution the same legitimacy as a just war...Vattimo is also critical of Catholic teachings that demand that the laws of the state must conform to the laws that the Church claims to be "natural." (AC, 115)

¹¹⁰ Vattimo gives the example of the "natural brotherhood of man" and when and how it fell into crisis and began to reveal its violent foundations. (AC, 115)

¹¹¹ Vattimo observes that metaphysical violence deeply affects many of the most controversial aspects of 'Christian morality'; especially the case of 'sexual morality'. He explains this with the help of Dilthey; "According to Dilthey, metaphysics lasted well after Kant because the philosophical meaning of the new Christian concern with interiority, subjectivity, and, ultimately, freedom emerges only after a long period during which the metaphysical objectivism of antiquity continued to prevail." (AC, 114-116)

¹¹² Vattimo further explains, "in this view, the commandment of charity appears totally consequential. What ultimately matters is knowledge of the truth, which involves detachment from the sensible good so that struggle for survival and conflict with others may be reduced. However, the positive meaning of forgoing violence is not an (ethical) openness to the other." (AC, 117-118)

i.e., an ontology of weakening. To be clear: the Christian inheritance that ‘returns’ in weak thought is primarily the Christian precept of charity and its rejection of violence” (*B*, 44).

Together with ‘weak thought’, Vattimo adopts both a Nietzschean notion of ‘the death of God’ and ‘the fabulisation’ of the world to substantiate his Heideggerian interpretation of ‘overcoming metaphysical violence’. Thus, metaphysical violence gives way to hermeneutical nihilism, the fixed world of subject and object dissolving into a play of interpretations. With this conception of the end of metaphysics, Nietzsche anticipates the complex meaning of many, if not all, the discourses that have been at the centre of philosophical attention since the end of the nineteenth century.

Vattimo suggests that there is a link between metaphysics and violence that is reducible to a definite schema. He argues that this may perhaps have an implication more similar to Nietzsche’s approach to metaphysics. “The unmasking of metaphysics that marks the advent of nihilism reveals its ties to a condition of violence and is an act of violence itself.”¹¹³ It is related to an inseparable aspect of the crisis of metaphysics, a crisis that occurs in relation to a manifestation of violence as such. Vattimo argues:

[This] could occur in the more evident sense that once metaphysical beliefs are weakened, there is no longer anything that limits the conflictual nature of existence, the struggle between weak and strong for a supremacy no longer legitimated by anything (natural or divine laws etc.) but by the mere fact of imposing itself; or it could occur in the sense that seems decisive for Nietzsche (and for the problem of metaphysics in general), whereby the weakening of metaphysical beliefs not only uncovers the violence of existence for what it is and makes it no longer possible, but is born as the result of an outburst of violence.¹¹⁴

These two features of the link between metaphysics and violence should be considered together. Vattimo observes that the theoretical unmasking undertaken by the school of suspicion and the practical-political coming to light of violence without limits (as mentioned above) “summarise the transformations and crises that philosophy has undergone in the last one hundred years.”¹¹⁵ However, for Vattimo, it is possible to unmask the metaphysical violence in the ‘fabulisation of being’ and ‘the death of metaphysical God’.

¹¹³ Gianni Vattimo, “Conclusion: Metaphysics and Violence” in *Weak Philosophy; Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo*, ed., Santiago Zabala, London: McGill University Press, 2007, pp. 400-424.

¹¹⁴ Gianni Vattimo, “Conclusion: Metaphysics and Violence”, pp.400-424.

¹¹⁵ Gianni Vattimo, “Conclusion: Metaphysics and Violence”, pp. 400-424.

3.2.2 The Death of God: Self-sacrifice or Historical Inevitability

In a dialogue with Jeffrey W. Robbins, Vattimo proposes two complementary meanings for ‘the death of God’: (1) Nietzsche’s anthropological argument that mankind has killed God because he is no longer a necessity, deconstructs the primitive conception of God as a necessity. Obedience to God demanded laws and rules which in their pursuit of truth promoted science and technology which then revealed God as an unnecessary hypothesis. In Nietzsche’s mind, God was as a lie. Vattimo, however, is more convinced of a non-literal interpretation of the death of God. (2) This is the death of Christ on the Cross. Vattimo explains, “Why? Because it is exactly after Christianity, or the event of Christianity, that it becomes possible to no longer believe in the classical, rational gods of the Greeks”¹¹⁶ (*ADG*, 90). The event of Christ’s death kills metaphysics. Christianity turns the attention of man inward so that philosophy and religion become more subjective (*ADG*, 89-90). Vattimo sees a parallel between nihilism and Christianity, “because Jesus came into the world not to demonstrate what the ‘natural’ order was but to demolish it in the name of charity” (*FT*, 59). The death of Christ reveals that the core of the idea of Christianity is the negation of a necessary, objective, rational (i.e., eternal) structure of the world. Ethical Christianity should involve the dissolution of faith in the metaphysical structure of the world. The Nietzschean understanding of the death of God corresponds to the ‘death of God’ introduced by Christianity, i.e., “no structure, no objective or eternal God” (*ADG*, 91). This unearths its resemblance in the Heideggerian idea of the dissolution of metaphysics, which realises itself in Vattimo’s theories of secularisation and *kenosis*. This final dissolution of both supreme values and the metaphysical belief in an objective and eternal order of ‘Being’ marks the advent of nihilism.¹¹⁷

Vattimo contends that the Nietzschean claim that ‘believers have killed God’ should not be read literally. Vattimo detects a resemblance between ‘death of art’ and ‘death

¹¹⁶ Gianni, Vattimo, *A Farewell to Truth*, trans., William McCuaig and forward by Robert T. Valgenti, New York: Columbia Press, 2011, p. 58. Hereafter this text will be cited as *FT* with corresponding page number.

¹¹⁷ It is remarkable to note that Vattimo’s ‘death of God’ bears a resemblance to Thomas J. J. Altizer’s theory of ‘the death of God.’ Both Vattimo, and Altizer were influenced by Nietzsche. They both share similar accounts of God’s emptying/humiliation in history to make himself immanent. However, Vattimo observes that other ‘death of God’ theologians including Altizer did not “articulate an explicit theory of secularisation, and of the death of God as the positive affirmation of divinity based on the idea of incarnation.” (*AC*, 37).

of God' arguments. He writes, "when discussing the death of art, we are speaking within the framework of an effective perverted realisation of the Hegelian absolute Spirit. Or rather... we are speaking within the framework of an accomplished metaphysics that has arrived at its end, in the sense in which Heidegger, (who sees Nietzsche's work as a philosophical anticipation of this) speaks of such an occurrence" (*EM*, 51-52). The 'death of art' is not to be understood as a 'notion' corresponding to a certain state of things. Rather, it is an 'event' (an announcement) that constitutes the historical and ontological constellation in which one moves. "This constellation is a network of historical and cultural events and of the words which belong to them, at once describing and co-determining them" (*EM*, 52). The 'death of art' concerns, in the *geschicklich* sense, what is 'destined' (*EM*, 52). The Nietzschean 'death of God' also has 'the character of an announcement' (*AC*, 13) within history. In this sense, 'the death of God' can be characterised as an historical inevitability. The end of metaphysics is also an announcement (event) that cannot be ascertained objectively, 'one to which thought is called to respond'. "It is an event that transforms the existence of the person who receives the announcement..." (*AC*, 13). Only if the characteristic of 'event' and 'announcement' are properly conceived, can one "recognise the analogy, or close continuity, between the Nietzschean doctrine of the death of God," the 'death of art', "and the end of metaphysics" (*AC*, 13). For Vattimo, this philosophical trinity provides the general framework of post-modern experience.

Vattimo turns to Nietzsche to elucidate the post-modern implications of the 'death of God'. In *Gay Science* he argues:

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?¹¹⁸

As Vattimo suggests in his explanation of the death of God, belief in God is no longer a powerful instrument of rationalisation in academic disciplines. The scientific world view paved the way for technology with "its reassuring effects that facilitate existence" (*AC*, 12). According to Vattimo, "[T]his is why Nietzsche argues that believers have killed God" (*AC*, 12). And yet, when announcing 'the death of God' Nietzsche

¹¹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Bernard Williams ed., Josefine Nauckhoff, trans., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, Section 125, The Madman.

anticipates that his shadow will continue to be cast upon the world. The announcement of ‘the death of God’ or ‘the end of metaphysics’ does not close off Nietzsche’s argument with religion (AC, 11-12). Vattimo strongly defends Nietzsche against the criticism that he is the ‘murderer of God’. “Nietzschean doctrine has only the character of an announcement;¹¹⁹ Nietzsche is not advocating an atheistic metaphysics, which would imply the claim to describe reality correctly as something from which God is excluded” (AC, 13). ‘The death of God’ or ‘the end of metaphysics’ is not a discovery ‘Being’ is a mere objectivity reduced by science. It is rather a series of events that transforms existence and beliefs through post-metaphysical interpretation.

Vattimo foresees a renewal of religion as a consequence of the events of ‘the death of god.’ For him, it is an existential and onto-theological necessity that religions (Christianity) undergo a dialogical and interpretive process of weakening. It is the moral God of philosophers who has died. Vattimo finds many indications that the death of the moral God has paved the way for the renewal of religious life (AC, 15-16). The ‘death of God’ and the ‘end of metaphysics’ are not merely the discoveries of a philosopher or school of thought. It is ultimately associated with a series of ‘events’ that have transformed existence, “of which post-metaphysical philosophy gives an ‘interpretation’ rather than an objective description” (AC, 15). If so, the ‘death of God’, is an historical ‘event’, the ‘self-sacrifice’ of God himself. Vattimo feels significantly that the ‘death of God’ has liquidated the philosophical basis for atheism: “it seems that the main philosophical outcome for the death of metaphysical God and of the almost general discrediting of philosophical foundationalism is the renewed possibility of religious experience” (AC, 16). Vattimo accordingly proposes a post-metaphysical interpretation and a renewed possibility of the return of religion through his praxis-oriented philosophy. Accordingly, religious experience without the image of the metaphysical God is possible.

¹¹⁹ The ‘death of God’ as an announcement should be taken beyond its literal meaning. Vattimo explains, “It should be taken in the light of the general phenomenon of the lightening of existence brought about by the rationalisation that was initially related to belief in God. This phenomenon has made useless and obsolete the radical hypothesis concerning the existence of a Supreme Being as the ground and ultimate *telos* of the world” (AC, 12).

3.3 Nihilistic Vocation

Vattimo interprets nihilism, first, in a Nietzschean sense. Nihilism can be defined as belief in the truth of a fiction which is not recognised as fiction but as reality. Nihilism is “the dissolution of [all] ultimate foundations, the understanding that in the history of philosophy, and of the Western culture in general, ‘God is dead’, and ‘the real world has become a fable’” (*NE*, xxv). Nihilism, in this sense, is an historical process by which the highest values (Being, God) devalue themselves. Thus, for Nietzsche, nihilism is the ‘death of God’ and ‘the devaluation of the highest values’. To understand Heideggerian nihilism in its relation to Nietzsche’s, Vattimo “attributes to the term ‘value’ – which reduces Being into itself – the rigorous sense of ‘exchange-value’” (*EM*, 21). Therefore, nihilism is the reduction of ‘Being’ into ‘exchange-value’, i.e., into things and commodities. If one follows the main thread supplied by the nexus nihilism/value, one may say after Nietzsche that nihilism is the consumption of the use-value in exchange-value. Vattimo explains; “nihilism does not mean that Being is in the power of the subject; rather, it means that Being is completely dissolved in the discovery of value, in the infinite transformations of universal equivalence” (*EM*, 22). By ‘exchange values’, Heidegger and Nietzsche refer to the values by which we order and organise our lives. They encompass every idea and concept that we imbue with value from religion, morality, and philosophy. What Nietzsche calls for is a kind of self-consciousness about the fact that values are posited to enhance our lives. Instead of being enslaved by values posited by rulers or predecessors, we must reclaim the function of positing values, such that we can enhance our lives. Positing values is what Nietzsche sees as the full exercise of the will to power and as a solution to the problem of nihilism. With this interpretation, Heidegger fundamentally diverges on the grounds that Nietzsche, in his ‘devaluation of the highest powers hitherto’ has presupposed a kind of Cartesian interpretation concerning the meaning of Being that binds him to the limits of the very value-thinking he despises. In this regard, Vattimo’s position on nihilism can be understood by referring to a phrase that often appears in Nietzsche’s work, namely that of ‘accomplished nihilism’. Accomplished nihilism can be construed as the “situation in which man rolls from the centre toward X” (*EM*, 19). It also resembles Heideggerian nihilism, in which at the end, ‘there is nothing left’ of ‘Being’ as such.

Vattimo traces the roots of an accomplished nihilism to the superfluity of highest values. This is possible because the conditions of existence are less violent and less prone to pathos after the death of God. The liquidation of the highest values does not signify the establishment or re-establishment of a situation of 'value' in the strong sense (*EM*, 24). He asserts that nihilism, like the 'fable', maintains in Nietzsche's philosophical vocabulary some of the same traits that it has in everyday language. Seen from the perspective of 'accomplished nihilism', "this occurrence can be understood in terms of the generalization of exchange-value in our society" (*EM*, 25).

Vattimo sketches a commonsensical link between Heideggerian nihilism, and Nietzschean nihilism. Vattimo explains; "[T]his characterisation of nihilism is constructed by Heidegger in such a way as to include that accomplished nihilist Nietzsche, even if, for Heidegger, it seems possible and desirable to go beyond nihilism, while for Nietzsche the accomplishment of nihilism is all that we should wait and hope for" (*EM*, 20). Thus, for Nietzsche, nihilism is the death of God and the devaluation of highest values; it is the reduction and annihilation of 'Being' into value (*EM*, 20). According to Heidegger, the reduction of 'Being' to value places Being in the power of a subject who 'recognises' values. Here in the Heideggerian sense of nihilism, 'Being' relies on the power of the subject, rather than existing in an autonomous, independent, and foundational way.

Concerning the existential nuances of nihilism, Vattimo casts Heidegger as a philosopher who has a nostalgia for 'Being'. Heidegger writes that *Ge-Stell*¹²⁰ is also a 'flashing up of the *Ereignis*',¹²¹ "or of the advent of being in which every appropriation (every giving-forth of something qua something) occurs only as a trans-appropriation" (*EM*, 26). Vattimo explains further; "this process of dizzying circularity strips both humanity and 'Being' of every metaphysical characteristic. The trans-appropriation in which the *Ereignis* of Being realised is, in the end, the dissolution of Being in exchange-value, that is in language and in the tradition constituted by the transmission and interpretation of messages" (*EM*, 26). In the epoch of exchange-value

¹²⁰ *Gestell* is used by Heidegger to describe *enframing*. We may wonder what does Heidegger means by "enframing"? Enframing – *Gestell*, is the essence of modern technology – *die Wesentliches der Technologie*. With respect to Heidegger's mindset, *Gestell* is the way in which truth reveals itself as the 'standing-reserve' – *die stehender Pufferspeicher*, <http://monday-wtfs.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/enframing-gestell.html>, accessed on 12/03/2015.

¹²¹ *Ereignis* is translated often as "an event," but is better understood in terms of something "coming into view." It comes from the German prefix, *er-*, comparable to 're-' in English.

everything is given in a more evident and exaggerated fashion. This narration is articulated by the mass media, which is inextricably intertwined with the tradition of messages, language, and culture. Therefore, this conception of 'Being transforming into exchange-value', i.e., the world becoming a fable, is nihilistic even insofar as it leads to a weakening of the cogent force of reality.

Vattimo refers to nihilism as the end-point of modernity where 'weak thought' takes precedence over objectivist metaphysics. His notion of the 'return' of/ return to religion is deeply informed by his nihilism (*B*, 29). Developing the relation of nihilistic vocation to Christian religion, Vattimo, in *Farewell to Truth* (*FT*, 59) explains that nihilism equals Christianity because Jesus came into the world not to demonstrate what the 'natural' order was, but to demolish it in the name of charity. In his concept of nihilism as the end-point of modernity, 'weak thought' takes precedence over metaphysicalism. It leads to the 'fact' that there is no universal and stable conception of truth, but rather truth is interpreted as an *event*.

3.3.1 Truth as Event versus Correspondence

Vattimo's theory of truth is influenced by Nietzsche and Heidegger's notions of Being. He does not reject truth *per se* (*FT*, viii) but recognises it as something construed. His 'weak thought' is the renunciation of both claims to universal truth, and to stable order of reality. Analysing Nietzschean and Heideggerian 'truth' and 'being', Vattimo constructs a hermeneutical ontology of truth. While relying on the deconstruction of Heidegger's critique of truth as correspondence, Vattimo expresses the doubt that "without some idea of evidence, and correspondence, it is not possible to secure these¹²² applications of the notion of truth, without which thought seems to abdicate its vocation?"¹²³ This can be answered only by either reconstructing or constructing the positive terms of a hermeneutic conception of truth. For Vattimo; "it is precisely a meditation on the insufficiency of the idea of truth as correspondence of judgment to thing that has set us on the path of Being as event" (*BI*, 76).

¹²² "Defending the validity of an assertion or in putting forward a rational critique of the existing order, or in correcting a false opinion and so passing from appearance to truth..." (*BI*, 75).

¹²³ Gianni Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation: The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*, trans., D. Webb. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997, p. 75. Hereafter this text will be cited as *BI* with corresponding page number.

Nietzsche, on the other hand, says Vattimo, “thinks that what exists is the pure conflictual interplay of force and power, a conflict among interpretations with no mooring in any objective norm that could decide truth” (*FT*, 4). Vattimo states that being and truth are not to be understood as objective data that precede the application of ‘conceptual schemes’.

[W]e can speak of Being only at the level of the events in which the ever-varying modes that structure the world of human historical experience are instituted. Being is not an object, it is the aperture within which alone man and the world, subject and object, can enter stability on the subject (which arises only within the specific apertures), Being should be thought of as “event”: Being is not, properly speaking, but rather “comes about”, happens (*EN*, 6).

Vattimo’s ‘non-metaphysical’ notion of truth and ‘Being’ conceives of truth and ‘Being’ as *event*, (*Ereignis*) rather than as objects endowed with permanence and stability. In other words, truth and ‘Being’ are constantly interpreted, re-written, and remade (*EM*, xx). Jon R Synder in his ‘Translator’s Introduction’ to *The End of Modernity* describes the process of *eventing*. He explains, “while truth can certainly be experienced by us, it can never be appropriated and transmitted to others as a kind of rational knowledge” (*EM*, xx). If truth is characterised as rational knowledge, as an object, it loses its eventual nature as something that occurs in the unique circumstances of each interpretive encounter. An *event* never begins or ends within the temporality of time and an *event* remains an *event* so long as it continues to effect history and language. An *event* can also show itself only in part, as its other parts are withheld as a promise to be revealed. If there is a truth event, what it withholds will be brought out only by critique and philosophy. Vattimo seeks to bring out the inside (that which is withheld) of the *event* through his ‘weak thought’.

In *After Christianity*, Vattimo argues that a way out of modernity cannot be achieved by retrieving the concept of ‘Being’ as a stable and eternal, supra-historical structure, but rather by thinking more radically of Being as *event*. He explains, “Being gives itself as an announcement or ‘sending’ as Heidegger says, that comes from the tradition of which postmodern thought is the heir”¹²⁴(*AC*, 43). The system of values itself

¹²⁴ Vattimo further explains that such “a sending forth belongs to the history of salvation developed by Joachim of Fiore, in so far as it retains all the features of what Joachim called the beginning of the age of spirit” (*AC*, 43). However, Vattimo has “rediscovered Joachim’s teachings by starting from the thesis of the end of metaphysics, that is, the idea that Being announces itself as event and destiny of weakening” (*AC*, 44).

becomes an infinite process of *event* and transformation. It is in this transforming *event* and into this flux of values that the traditional metaphysical being has begun to dissolve and disappear. 'Being' itself is forever subject to further *eventing* and revaluation. It goes through "the interpretative process through which the value that has previously been assigned to something is exchanged for another equivalent value" (*EM*, xxi). Brian Schroeder argues that "it is a transforming occurrence."¹²⁵ Insofar as it is transformative, such an *event* has an experiential character. Moreover, this transformation is connected to an interpretative work of reconstructing of meaning that is also emancipatory in the sense of *Verwindung*. Snyder says that this experience can be called 'postmodern' and has its origin in the reduction of everything, including 'Being' to exchange value and may be called the infinite interpretability of reality (*EM*, xxi).

The infinite interpretability of reality allows the 'weakening' of metaphysical 'Being' and truth (*EM*, xxi). Vattimo contends that the experience of infinite interpretability has led to 'the weakening of the cogent force of reality': it has made 'all that is given by metaphysics as real, necessary, peremptory and true' into another interpretive possibility amongst others (*EM*, 27). The metaphor of 'weak thought' describes the possibility of post-modernity and its related *hermeneutic ontology*. Hermeneutical ontology facilitates the possible interpretation of our condition or situation. 'Being' is nothing outside of its *event*, and that *event* occurs when 'Being' historicises itself and we subsequently historicise ourselves (*EM*, 3). The infinite interpretability and 'event' nature of truth and 'Being' eventually led to 'the weakening' of the Christian faith.

3.3.2 Weakening Christian Faith

As Vattimo explains in *Belief*, the 'circularity of his life-situation'¹²⁶ that prompted his 'departure' and 'return' to religion embodied the weakening of Christian faith. Vattimo finds a relation between his personal Christian inheritance and Nietzschean-Heideggerian nihilism. He explains, "I should say that the Christian inspiration makes itself felt in my reading of Heidegger precisely in its characterisation as 'weak'" (*B*,

¹²⁵ Silva Benso and Brian Schroeder, *Between Nihilism and Politics: Hermeneutics of Gianni Vattimo*, p. 3.

¹²⁶ Vattimo's 'circularity of life-situation' can be portrayed as **religion→ politics→ philosophy→ religion**.

34). However, Vattimo does not point to a time when the link between ‘weak thought’ and Christianity happened in his life. His explanation is that it may have been during the experience of suffering, sickness and death of those dear to him (*B*, 35-36).

Taking recourse to Girard’s *Violence and Sacred*, Vattimo explains that the sacred is deeply related to violence. Harmony can be established only by finding the scapegoat on which to focus violence (*B*, 37). While retaining the status of a sacrificial victim, the scapegoat is invested with sacred attributes. This scapegoat-victim is retained in the Bible with Jesus as the perfect victim. Girard argues against this Christian thought. He says that “Jesus’ incarnation did not take place to supply the Father with a victim adequate to his wrath; rather, Jesus came into the world precisely to reveal and abolish the nexus between violence and the sacred. He was put to death because such a revelation was intolerable to a humanity rooted in the violent tradition of sacrificial religions”¹²⁷ (*B*, 37 and *CTWF*, 27). Vattimo goes beyond Girard to explain the nihilistic recovery of Christianity. He argues that Girard’s violent God does not shun his metaphysical attributes. Unless these are disbanded, the end image of God or the ‘death of God’ of Nietzsche cannot be realised (*B*, 38-39).

‘Weak thought’ should not be taken as a negative preparation for the return of religion. “By contrast”, Vattimo explains, “the incarnation, that is God’s abasement to the level of humanity, what the New Testament calls God’s *kenosis*, will be interpreted as the sign that the non-violent and non-absolute God of the post-metaphysical epoch has as its distinctive trait the vocation for weakening...” (*B*, 39). Vattimo experiences this weak ontology as the ‘transcription’ of the Christian message as a great event, as a kind of decisive recovery. It helped him re-establish continuity with his religious origins. This reflection “paved the way for a conception of secularisation characteristic of modern Western history as an event within Christianity linked positively to Jesus’ message and to a conception of the history of modernity as a weakening and dissolution of ‘Being’” (*B*, 40-41). If the natural sacred’s violent mechanism is

¹²⁷ Gianni Vattimo and Rene Girard, *Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue*, ed., Pierpalo Antonello, and trans., William McCuaig, New York: Columbia University press, 2010, p. 27. Hereafter this text will be cited as *CTWF* with corresponding page number. Vattimo further elaborates, “in fact, the non-victimary reading of the Scripture was already there in the original teachings of Jesus, but as the Vulgate text of John 1:5 has it, “*et lux in tenebris lucet, et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt.*” The light – of life, flowing from the *word/verbum/logos* – shines in the darkness and the darkness could not comprehend it.” (*CTWF*, 79-80)

unveiled and undermined by Jesus, it is possible that secularisation is a positive effect of Jesus' teaching, not a way of moving away from it.

For this reason, Carmelo Dotolo comments, "secularisation is able to re-propose the question of God as the question of contemporary reality, but on the condition that one does not substitute God for the metaphysical one, even if freed from the sacred arrangements of the natural religion."¹²⁸ This argument finds greater clarity in *Beyond Interpretation*. Vattimo explains, "we are led to the hypothesis that hermeneutics itself, as a philosophy with certain ontological commitments, is the fruit of secularisation as the renewal, pursuit, application, and interpretation of the substance of the Christian revelation, and pre-eminently the dogma of the incarnation of God" (*BI*, 52). Vattimo maintains that reading Girard on 'weak thought' helped him to 'complete' Heidegger, to clarify the meaning of Girard's thought and eventually to reopen communication between contemporary post-metaphysical philosophy and Judaeo-Christian tradition (*CTWF*, 78). For Vattimo, 'weakening of Christian faith' is realised through the hermeneutic of 'overcoming metaphysics', that is by weakening all absolute claims to stable foundations.

3.3.3 Overcoming Metaphysics

Taking a cue from Nietzsche, Vattimo writes, "metaphysics is itself an act of violence because it wants to appropriate the 'most fertile regions' hence of the first principles, to dominate and control" (*ADG*, 43). Aristotle in his metaphysics expresses the same opinion that the wise know all by knowing the first cause, and are thereby able to control and determine all its effects. "Our tradition is dominated by the idea that if we only had a stable foundation we could move and act more freely" (*ADG*, 43). Nietzsche and Heidegger postulated theories of the 'death of God' and the 'overcoming of metaphysics' by deconstructing this traditional understanding of foundationalism, i.e., 'Being' as stable, truth as objective, and the existence of God. By overcoming metaphysics, Heidegger speaks of a process of emancipation. Vattimo supplies

¹²⁸ Carmelo Dotolo, "The Hermeneutics of Christianity and Philosophical Responsibility" in *Weakening Philosophy*, ed., Santiago Zabala, Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007, pp. 348-368.

philosophical reasons for preferring a liberal, tolerant, and democratic society rather than an authoritarian and totalitarian one” (NE, 19).

As we have established, Vattimo elucidates his argument about the overcoming of metaphysics from the Nietzschean and Heideggerian nihilistic perspective. Vattimo is aware of the conflicting encounters that occur whenever the possibility of overcoming metaphysics is recognised. He observes that “[m]etaphysics cannot be overcome but only *verwunden* - accepted, distorted, and continued...” (AC, 119). It will be difficult to think of perfection if not as the identification with Being itself, God, the Supreme principle. It is hard to think of metaphysics, or of any essential knowledge, if other than as the theoretical appropriation of first-principles. Therefore, it will be difficult to ground the law if not in an incontrovertible, unquestionable and given structure, which as such can also legitimate the use of force (AC, 118-119).

Vattimo examines the Nietzschean and Heideggerian ‘overcoming’ of metaphysics as an approach that generates a positive possibility. Nietzsche’s accomplished nihilism and Heidegger’s *Verwindung* of metaphysics are not a critical overcoming (EM, 11) but a constructive one within the post-modern condition. Santiago Zabala comments on this post-modern condition explaining, “Vattimo does not regard post-modernity as a radical ‘rapture’ with modernity because for him postmodernism is a new attitude to the modern...”¹²⁹ Vattimo for all his constructive analysis of modernity and ‘overcoming metaphysics’ makes use of two of Heidegger’s central philosophical concepts: *Überwindung* and *Verwindung*.

3.3.4 *Überwindung* vs *Verwindung*

Verwindung is set in opposition to *Überwindung* or ‘overcoming’ and implies a transition from one phase or moment to another ‘higher’ one in a given process. ‘Weak thought’ performs a *Verwindung* of the era of metaphysics. The *Verwindung* of the metaphysical tradition is at once a recovery from, recuperation, convalescence, and resignation from metaphysics and its strong notion of ‘Being.’ The Hegelian *Aufhebung* is a philosophical predecessor to *Verwindung* because in its negation

¹²⁹ Santiago Zabala, *Weakening Philosophy*, p. 14.

Aufhebung re-affirms what is negated, lifted up, and re-affirmed.¹³⁰ Vattimo does not propose a total and categorical overcoming of the perverted realisation of the absolute spirit, or of the death of art, but rather a healing of it and a resignation to it. He describes how the ‘death of art’ constitutes the end of metaphysics prophesied by Hegel, as lived by Nietzsche and as registered by Heidegger. However, Vattimo observes that thought stands in opposition to *Verwindung* regarding metaphysics and is not abandoned like an old, worn-out garment, for it still constitutes our ‘humanity’. We yield to metaphysics, we heal ourselves from it, we are resigned to it as something that is destined to us (*EM*, 52). For Vattimo, “*Verwindung* indicates something analogous to *Überwindung*, or overcoming, but is distinctly different from the latter. It has none of the characteristics of a dialectical *Aufhebung* (abolish/sublation [my emphasis]) and it contains no sense of a ‘leaving-behind’ of a past that no longer has anything to say to us. Precisely this difference between *Verwindung* and *Überwindung* can help us to understand in philosophical terms the ‘post’ in ‘postmodernism’” (*EM*, 164).

Verwindung has its philosophical origin in Nietzsche, but it was Heidegger who first introduced the concept into philosophical discussion. He speaks about “the problem of the sense of being an *epigone*, that is, the problem of an excess of historical consciousness that plagues the nineteenth-century humanity” (*EM*, 165). Nietzsche argues that it can be cured with the help of the ‘supra-historical’ or ‘eternalising’ forces of religion and art. However, with the publishing of *Human All Too Human*, Nietzsche’s position concerning ‘historical sickness’ underwent a change (*EM*, 165). He proposed recourse to supra-historical and eternalising forces which bring into play the dissolution of modernity through a radicalisation of its own constitutive tendencies. Modern and contemporary philosophy goes beyond or is healed of its ‘historical sickness’ through a slow ‘weakening’ that brings it along with us as we convalesce from its era and its errors.

¹³⁰ By *Aufhebung*, Hegel designates a movement in which what is lower is surpassed and yet always preserved by being elevated into what is higher, gathered up into it. *Aufhebung* is also translated as sublation, which means to “out/up-lift. In Hegel, the term *Aufhebung* has the apparently contradictory implications of both preserving and changing/abolishing (the German verb *aufheben* means both “to cancel” and “to keep”).

“Modernity is the era of overcoming the new which rapidly grows old and is immediately replaced by something still newer, in an unstoppable movement that discourages all creativity and defines the latter as the sole possible form of life” (*EM*, 166). According to Vattimo, overcoming is typically a modern category, and therefore, does not enable us to use it as a way out of modernity. He replaces an unthinking notion of modernism as violent change with a more plausible and reflective notion, i.e., overcoming. (*EM*, 166). According to Vattimo, there is no escape from modernity by appeal to externalising forces, but only by a dissolution of its own inherent tendencies (*EM*, 166). Snyder explains; “truth, when its claims are carefully analysed in their own terms, reveals itself to be ‘a value which dissolves into itself’, or in other words, no more and no less than a belief without foundation...and his (Nietzsche’s) discovery of it is the moment of emergence of philosophical post-modernity” (*EM*, xIviii). Nietzsche radicalises modernity by reducing it to a series of material and ‘chemical’ reductions of value. This ‘chemical’ analysis leads to the discovery that truth is a value which dissolves itself. Thus, through ‘chemical analysis’, “the very notion of truth is dissolved: or in what amounts to the same thing, God, ‘dies’, slain by religiosity and by the will to truth which believers have always had, and which now leads them to recognise God himself as an error which one can do without” (*EM*, 167). This dissolution of truth is seen as the *kenosis* of God the Father¹³¹ or the *Verwindung* of the metaphysical notion of truth.

It is the *kenosis*, or weakening, of God the Father, “sending himself to human beings by making himself immanent history and scripture, as a live and saving message of good news.”¹³² Nietzsche argues that this nihilistic conclusion offers a way out of modernity and could be designated as the moment of the birth of post-modernity in philosophy. Since the notion of truth no longer exists and metaphysical foundations no longer function there can be no way out of modernity other than through critical overcoming; for the latter is part of modernity itself (*EM*, 167). Therefore, for Vattimo, post-modernity is possible only through the process of ‘weak thought,’ i.e., through *Verwindung* or *kenosis*.

¹³¹ Paul’s Letter to Philippians 2:7. It reads, “but he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being.” (*The Holy Bible*, The Revised Standard Version)

¹³² Santiago Zabala, *Weakening Philosophy*, p. 376.

Vattimo explains *Verwindung*, as a ‘twisting’, convalescence-alteration of existing structures, whether they are religious, political, or cultural in some other respect, rather than their total annihilation or destruction. It “indicates a ‘going beyond’, that is both an acceptance [or ‘resignation’] and a deepening, whilst also suggesting both a ‘convalescence,’ ‘cure’ or ‘healing’ and a ‘distorting’ or ‘twisting’ (*EM*, 172). Joan Stambaugh, has described the difference between *Überwindung* and *Verwindung* in terms of incorporation. She says;

[W]hen something is overcome in the sense of being *überwunden*, it is defeated and left behind. This is not the sense Heidegger intends here. When something is overcome in the sense of being *verwunden*, it is, so to speak, incorporated. For example, when one ‘overcomes’ a state of pain, one does not get rid of the pain. One has ceased to be preoccupied with it and has learned to live with it. Thus, to overcome metaphysics would mean to incorporate metaphysics, perhaps with the hope, but not with the certainty, of elevating it to a new reality.¹³³

Vattimo observes in *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy*; “we should leave the logic of *Überwindung* or ‘overcoming’ behind and turn to the logic of *Verwindung*. This distinction between two terms gives more clarity to the meaning of *Verwindung*. It refers to “‘turning into new purposes’, ‘surpassing’, ‘twisting’, ‘resigning’, and ‘accepting ironically’.”¹³⁴ He explains that the *Verwinden* era of metaphysics means to ‘overcome’ it, but not in the commonly accepted sense of a ‘leaving behind’ or abandoning and ‘going beyond’; rather it means to go beyond metaphysics by accepting and being resigned to it, while seeking at the same time to be cured of metaphysics by twisting it in a different direction in order to drain off its strength.

Vattimo recaps that metaphysics cannot be set aside like an opinion. Nor can it be left behind like a doctrine in which one no longer believes, rather, it is something which remains within one, like the traces of an illness or a kind of pain to which one is resigned. For him, *Verwindung*, “which we experience as the sole possible form of post-metaphysical thought, is not only a matter of thought: rather, it concerns ‘Being’ as such” (*EM*, 179). It can be argued that nihilism is not an error of the mind but the destiny of ‘Being’ itself. This destiny of ‘Being’ is actualized with the help of *Verwindung*, and Vattimo argues that the hermeneutical *being* of ‘Being’ (that underwent the process of *Verwindung*) is not to be ignored or overlooked but experienced in every human situation.

¹³³ Joan Stambaugh, *The Finitude of Being*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 84.

¹³⁴ Frederiek Depoortere, *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy*, p. 6.

The history which we recollect has the structure of the *Verwindung* of recollection and distortion. Since it appears to be a very abstract generalisation, Vattimo translates *Verwindung* into a familiar term; secularisation. “Secularisation/*Verwindung* would describe the course of history not as a linear progression or as decadence, but as a course of events in which emancipation is reached only by means of a radical transformation and distortion of its very contents” (*EM*, 179). This *Verwindung* and distortion of the metaphysical ‘Being’ is described by Vattimo as the *kenosis*. The notion of *kenosis* is seen as the epicentre of the *End of Modernity*. Accordingly, *Verwindung* does not deny metaphysical ‘Being’ but rather remedies and heals it. Vattimo considers this as an opportunity for the philosophical reconstruction of religion.

Having explained the development and growth of the hermeneutic of ‘weak thought’, we now analyse how ‘weak thought’ becomes the hinge of Vattimo’s concept of ‘secularism’ and leads to displacing the metaphysical conception of truth.

CHAPTER FOUR

VATTIMO'S CONCEPT OF SECULARISATION

4.1 Vattimo's Concept of Secularisation

We have established that Vattimo through his hermeneutic of 'weak thought' and 'death of God' presupposes the end of a metaphysical God that prepares for the rediscovery of a Christian God. The rediscovery of religion is possible only when the prejudice of natural religion is removed. The meaning of the end of metaphysics is to reveal in 'Being' an essential inclination to assert its truth through weakening (*B*, 39). Therefore, weak ontology functions as an aid for the return of religion. As for Vattimo, 'returning home' experience allows him to re-establish continuity with his religious tradition. The discovery of the link between the history of Christian revelation and the history of nihilism helped him to interpret the history of the West in terms of the Christian message. This "paved the way for a conception of secularisation characteristic of modern Western history, as an event within Christianity linked positively to Jesus, and to a conception of Western modernity as the history of the weakening and the dissolution of Being" (*B*, 40-41).

Vattimo elucidates secularisation as the positive result of Jesus' teaching. He explains; "[I]f the natural sacred is the violent mechanism that Jesus came to unveil and undermine, it is possible that secularisation- which also constitutes the Church's loss of temporal authority and human reason's increasing autonomy from its dependence upon an absolute God, is precisely a positive effect of Jesus' teaching, and not a way of moving away from it" (*B*, 41). Based on this argument, and not seeking a paradoxical and picturesque implication of the concept of secularisation, Vattimo adheres to a 'positive' account of secularisation with the help of Max Webber¹³⁵ and Norbert Elias.¹³⁶ Secularisation is understood as lay modernity being constituted above all as the continuation and de-sacralisation of the Biblical message (*B*, 41-42).

¹³⁵ Max Weber's "analysis of the sociology of religion is remembered for its thesis that modern capitalism is the effect of the Protestant ethic, and more generally for the idea that the rationalization of modern society is unthinkable outside the Judaeo-Christian monotheistic perspective." (*B*, 41-42 and *CTWF*, 28)

¹³⁶ Norbert Elias' "works seek to illustrate the modern transformations in power as formalizations that increasingly diminish the absoluteness of the 'sacred' person's sovereignty. In the course of this process modern subjectivity is secularised as well." (*B*, 42 and *CTWF*, 28)

Secularisation becomes central to Vattimo, because it underlines his principal notion of 'weak thought'. The relevance of secularisation and its post-metaphysical nihilistic relation to the Christian message is elucidated in diverse statements given by Vattimo. (1) "[Secularisation] comprises all the forms of dissolution of the sacred characteristic of the modern process of civilisation. It is the mode in which the weakening of Being realises itself as the *kenosis* of God, which is the kernel of the history of salvation; secularisation shall no longer be conceived of as abandonment of religion but as the paradoxical realisation of Being's religious vocation" (AC, 24). (2) "[S]ecularisation as a 'positive' fact, signifies the dissolution of the sacred structures of Christian society, the transition to an ethics of autonomy, to a lay state, to a more flexible literalism in the interpretation of dogmas and precepts, should be understood not as the failure of or departure from Christianity, but as a fuller realisation of its truth, which is, as we recall, the *kenosis*, the abasement of God, which undermines the 'natural' features of divinity" (B, 47). (3) "Secularisation is the way in which *kenosis*, having begun with the incarnation of Christ, but even before that with the covenant between God and 'his' people, continues to realise itself more and more clearly by furthering the education of mankind concerning the overcoming/*Verwindung* of originary violence essential to the sacred and to social life itself" (B, 48). (4) Referring to twentieth century theological literature, secularisation is defined as "the purification of the Christian faith, the progressive dissolution of the 'natural' religious attitude in favour of a more open recognition of faith's authentic essence" (B, 47). Finally, in *Belief*, secularisation is described as "the constitutive trait of an authentic religious experience. It means precisely a relation of provenance from a sacred core from which one has moved away, but which nevertheless remains active even in its 'fallen' distorted version, reduced to purely worldly terms" (B, 22-23).

In a dialogue with Jeffrey W. Robin, Vattimo elucidates the correlation between the return of religion with the simultaneous process of secularisation. He suggests a variety of meanings for this connection and proposes the two most important ones. (1) "It is exactly because of the loss of a unified religious authority that there is a sort of rebirth of religiosity. Real religious authority relies on secularisation because religious authority is no longer single or uniform and there is no longer a central religious authority. (2) Secularisation and the new religiosity are also related by a sort of

therapeutic connection...”¹³⁷ (ADG, 95). By means of secularisation, hermeneutical philosophy plays a vital role in this religious revival, and helps to repeat and re-discover new possibilities for religion. “It is precisely because the God of Greek philosophy is dead that it is possible to listen to the Bible again” (ADG, 97). Here secularisation works as an impetus to abandon atheism. “Religion can have religious meaning only with the help of philosophy, that is, with the help of a theory of secularisation that recognises in the many traits of the modern world, the basic features of Christianity”¹³⁸ (ADG, 97). Therefore, secularisation has influenced Christianity with a sense of acknowledging and accepting the problems of the world. Christianity in praxis finds its truth in a secularised form of democratic society. It is the desacralisation of the Christian message regarding ethics - less violent politics, shared power, etc. (ADG, 98).

As explained, *Verwindung* and the distortion of metaphysical ‘Being’ is the process of secularisation. Carmelo Dotolo¹³⁹ remarks that interpreting secularisation means following the intentionality of *Verwindung*. *Verwindung* in this perspective is understood not in terms of dialectical overcoming. *Verwindung* recognises “the very weakness of Being emergent in the process of secularisation of modernity in its link with religion.”¹⁴⁰ Since weak thought is the motivational link between the *Verwindung* of metaphysics and nihilism (desacralising), it points to weakening as the structural characteristic of Being in post-modernity. If such thought (weak thought) has rediscovered its nihilistic vocation in the ontological decline of strong structures and the meaning of weak thought inscribes itself in the process of secularisation of philosophy, it is no wonder that weak thought is the exponent of the secularising process of Christianity and that “maybe secularisation is that which reopens the way to the transcendent.”¹⁴¹ Notably, secularisation is able to re-propose the question of God and Being, because weak thought being the transcription of the Christian message, discloses itself in the incarnation (*kenosis*) of God in the post-modern world as a

¹³⁷ Vattimo, I think, tends to use ‘therapeutic’ in the sense of ‘restorative.’ He uses the example of the restoration of religious practice in Italy, though his concern is secular religiosity.

¹³⁸ Vattimo gives the example of the Jesuits and Voltaire during Enlightenment: “Voltaire was more religious than the Jesuits were religious because the Jesuits were becoming the guardians of the traditional order of the society, while Voltaire was leading the case for the society of man.” (ADG, 97)

¹³⁹ Carmelo Dotolo, “The Hermeneutics of Christianity and Philosophical Responsibility”, pp. 348-368.

¹⁴⁰ Carmelo Dotolo, pp. 348-368.

¹⁴¹ Carmelo Dotolo, pp. 348-368.

progression of modernity. This deconstruction of the *Verwindung*/kenosis of God, and its progression to post-modernity is where hermeneutics plays its philosophical and ontological part in ripening the fruit of secularisation.

4.1.1 Secularisation as Progress

The signal feature of ‘weak thought’ and secularisation is to go beyond metaphysics and the sacred. It initiates possibilities for a new interpretation of religion and ethics. Secularisation acquires philosophical profundity when it is understood as a continuity and progress, and not as rupture. In this sense, secularisation is able to explain Western philosophical tradition by means of both historicism and post-modernism. Accordingly, secularisation is considered a process of transition, and a change of emphasis that is an historical awareness and belief in progress, which in itself is yet another secularisation (*EM*, 8). In post-modernity, secularisation indicates a ‘historicisation of history’. It can be interpreted as a break with modernity, or as a continuation of modernity; a more radical application of its historical outlook. It is not destruction but an improving, and overcoming of historicity. Thus, the post-modern is inherently present in the modern.

A link also develops between modernity, secularisation, and ‘the value of the new’.

The following points are central,

- (1) Modernity is characterised as the era of *Diesseitigkeit*, namely the abandonment of the sacred vision of existence and the affirmation of the realm of profane value instead, that is, of secularisation. (2) The key point of secularisation, at the conceptual level, is faith in progress...This occurs because progress depicts itself ever more insistently as a value in and of itself...Progress is just that process which leads towards a state of things in which further progress is possible... (3) This extreme secularisation of the providential vision of history is simply the equivalent of affirming the new as the fundamental value (*EM*, 101).

In this process of secularisation and ‘the value of the new’, art functions as an anticipation. This suggests that post-modernism was present in modernity from its very beginning, in the form of art’s pre-occupation with the new. “For art, these limitations and forms of metaphysical founding have long since been abandoned” (*EM*, 101). Therefore, secularisation itself contains a tendency toward dissolution. However, Vattimo “does not understand post-modern secularity as progress in the meaning that nineteenth century historicism ascribed to it. The post-modern notion of progress is one which is continuously aware of its own historicity and the artificiality of life

conditions.”¹⁴² It means an end to its unitary pretensions, not a return to a pre-scientific mode of existence. Secularisation in the end secularises itself; secularises the idea of progress and dissolves it. “This dissolution is linked on the one hand to the very process of secularisation itself” (*EM*, 102). It is an event that enables one to distance oneself from the mechanism of modernity (*EM*, 104). Such dissolution is not only experienced in the field of science and technology but also in the field of arts. Here, too, one is struck by the dissolution of the value of the new. This is understood as the age of post-modernity¹⁴³ (*EM*, 105).

The characteristic post-modern trait within secularisation is the dissolution of *progress*. The very idea of progress becomes a routine in modern societies due to the domination of technology and modern communication media. It belongs to modernity to ‘out-grow itself’ to see the idea of progress in an historical way, to discern that there might be no such thing as progress and teleology in history, and that even the idea of history may be mistaken or at least be out dated. Now let us look at Vattimo’s understanding of secularisation as *kenosis*.

4.1.2 Secularisation as *Kenosis*

Sometimes words move from one field of language to another. In modern philosophy, this applies to the original Greek word *kenosis* first used by theologians. Since philosophy’s religious turn, present-day philosophers use the concept of *kenosis* to search out new ways of speaking about God in an era after the ‘death of God’.¹⁴⁴ Vattimo makes a connection between secularisation and the end of metaphysics as a form of *kenosis*, by which the Christian God sheds more and more of his traditional metaphysical properties, bringing forth the truth of Christianity (*B*, 46-48). Vattimo tries to give a new interpretation of *kenosis* in the context of contemporary continental philosophy. The history of the West has the structure of *Verwindung*, in the senses of both recollection and distortion. Since this is a very abstract generalisation,

¹⁴² Marcel Sarot, Michael Scott, and Maarten Wisse, *Postmodern Condition and the Meaning of Secularity: A Study of Religious Dynamics of Postmodernity*, ed., *Ars Disputandi* (<http://www.ArsDisputandi.org>) 2011, assessed on 12/10/2013, p. 192.

¹⁴³ As for Vattimo, “post-modern cannot be reduced to a mere fact of cultural fashion. From architecture to the novel to poetry to the figurative arts, the post-modern displays, as its most common and most imposing trait, an effort to free itself from the logic of overcoming, development, and innovation.” (*EM*, 105)

¹⁴⁴ Reene D. N. van Riessen, *Man as a Place of God: Levinas' Hermeneutics of Kenosis*, Springer, 2007, p. 173.

Verwindung is translated into a familiar term: secularisation. “Secularisation/*Verwindung* would describe the course of history not as a linear progression or as decadence, but as a course of events in which emancipation is reached only by means of radical transformation and distortion of its very content” (*EM*, 179). This *Verwindung* and distortion of the metaphysical ‘Being’ is described as *kenosis*. This is an opportunity for a philosophical reconstruction of ‘Being’ in relation to the truth of Christianity.

Since ‘weak thought’ and secularisation are analysed in relation to the formative role of the Christian message, this understanding of secularisation paves the way for the emergence of hermeneutic tool of *kenosis*. With *kenosis*, Western philosophy overcomes metaphysics and rediscovers its roots in the Western religious tradition (*BI*, 43). This means that along with the significant role of hermeneutics in the rationalist philosophy of the West, hermeneutics also played an influential interpretive role in the religious West. Vattimo explains the hermeneutic link between nihilistic ontology and Christian religion.

It can rediscover its own authentic meaning as nihilistic ontology only if it recovers its substantial link, at source, with the Judaeo-Christian tradition as the constitutive tradition of the West. In other words: modern hermeneutic philosophy is born in Europe not only because here there is a religion of the book that focuses attention on the phenomenon of interpretation, but also because this religion has at its base the idea of the incarnation of God, which it conceives as *kenosis*, as abasement and, in our translation, as weakening (*BI*, 48).

Consequently, secularisation and hermeneutics in turn are rooted in Christianity as the religion of *kenosis*.

The word *kenosis* is derived from the Greek κένωσις means ‘to empty’ or to ‘make empty’. The theological meaning of the term is taken from the verb ἐκένωσεν (*ekénōsen*) as used in Philippians 2:7 which reads that “he [Christ] *emptied* himself” (*NRSV*). Introducing René Girard into this nihilistic philosophy, Vattimo identifies the ‘violent God’ with the God of metaphysics. It would indicate that God can be identified with the violent sacrality of natural religiosity¹⁴⁵ (*B*, 37-39). In contrast, the core of the New Testament is the incarnation, “God’s abasement to the level of humanity, which

¹⁴⁵ Girard advanced his study of the two-fold thesis that there is a close connection between violence and the sacred on the one hand, and that Christ’s incarnation dismantles his violence of the sacred on the other.

is described as *kenosis*¹⁴⁶ (B, 39). This is the *Verwindung* of 'Being', and the secularisation of the sacred in Christ. Accordingly, *kenosis* is "the removal of all the transcendent, incomprehensible, mysterious and even bizarre features that so many theorists term 'the leap of faith'" (B, 55).

According to Laurens ten Kate, *kenosis* is a significant concept "that evoke[s] the complex relationship between God and humanity, between transcendence and immanence, between the Sacred and the profane, between the Other and the Self, in short, the religious relationship, or the specific and enigmatic relationship we call religion."¹⁴⁷ Since the term is linked to 'friendship' and 'religion', many philosophers have an interest in *kenosis*¹⁴⁸. Kate proposes two opposing meanings for the concept: 1) the infinite distance between God and humanity - *kenosis* here means the 'emptying' or the exhausting, of any positive relationship between God and human beings,¹⁴⁹ and 2) the proximity of the divine and human worlds.¹⁵⁰ Slavoj Žižek defends the idea of *kenosis* as 'infinite proximity' in the second sense of the term. "To him, the 'death of the Son of God' on the cross - the pre-eminent kenotic event - is a mysterious, but ultimately 'happy event', 'giving birth to a new subject no longer rooted in a particular substance, redeemed of all particular links'. *Kenosis* is a 'happy event' because here God and human beings come together to form a new humanity that sheds its old nationalistic and ethnic identities."¹⁵¹ John Milbank defines *kenosis* as the incarnation of God in human language (B, 11). "Language is a gift from the Creator, in which He himself is involved via Christ's *kenosis* – emptying, exhausting himself in becoming man – it serves as the 'meeting point' of the divine and the human. Christ's *kenosis* is supposed to involve the disruption of the *logos* with its claims to identity, unity and universality."¹⁵²

¹⁴⁶ Vattimo explains, "God's abasement to the level of humanity, what the New Testament calls God's *kenosis*, will be interpreted as the sign that the non-violent and non-absolute God of the post-metaphysical epoch has as its distinctive trait the very vocation for weakening of which Heideggerian philosophy speaks." (B,39)

¹⁴⁷ Laurens ten Kate, "Econokenosis: Three Meanings of *Kenosis* in 'post-modern' Thought on Derrida, with reference to Vattimo and Barth", in *Letting Go: Rethinking Kenosis*, Universiteit Utrecht, 2002, pp.285-310.

¹⁴⁸ Laurens ten Kate, pp. 285-310.

¹⁴⁹ Laurens ten Kate, pp. 285-310.

¹⁵⁰ Laurens ten Kate, pp. 285-310.

¹⁵¹ Laurens ten Kate, pp. 285-310.

¹⁵² Laurens ten Kate, pp. 285-310.

Parallel to the political and linguistic critique of *kenosis*, an existential and experiential approximation of *kenosis* can be observed. Luca D Isanto, comments that Vattimo finds closeness between the kenotic message of the gospel and nihilistic philosophy. “Kenosis...is understood as the hope for a peaceful humanity” (*B*, 8), but the analogy with nihilism does not imply a “conversion to Christianity, but rather an interpretation” (*B*, 9). Being is not an *a priori* principle that can be described or represented in a sensible intuition. Being is rather an event that occurs as an announcement of language and is oriented towards spiritualisation and *kenosis*. This is manifested in history and language through Christ’s incarnation disclosing that the divine is entirely absorbed with historicity and language. Incarnation becomes ‘fact’ insofar as it reveals God as a peaceful, dialogical word (*B*, 11).

Nihilism is understood as *kenosis* and as the self-exhaustion of the transcendent. It announces itself with the logic of religion (*B*, 12). This argument is explained in *Beyond Interpretation*.

[T]he *kenosis* that occurs as the incarnation of God and most recently as secularisation and the weakening of Being and its strong structures (to the point of dissolution of the ideal of truth as objectivity) takes place in accordance with a ‘law’ of religion, at least in the sense that it is not by its own decision that the subject is committed to a process of ruin, for one finds oneself called to such a commitment by the ‘thing itself’ (*BI*, 53).

The logic of nihilism coincides with the logic of *kenosis*, the law which carries to its logical conclusion a conception of ‘the historicity as belonging’.¹⁵³ This is an aid primarily to interpret postmodern secularisation as taking place within the context of the Christian tradition. By articulating secularisation as *kenosis*, truth can be saved from a mere deconstruction of metaphysics.

The theology of Joachim of Fiore (1135-1202)¹⁵⁴ functions as a tool for Vattimo to deconstruct metaphysics and enter a new realm of thought (*AC*, 31 and *BI*, 49-51). The deconstruction of metaphysics and the process of secularisation as *kenosis* is realised

¹⁵³ ‘Historicity as belonging’ is a hermeneutical theory of Dilthey and later Heidegger. Vattimo uses this in *Belief*. “Dilthey’s thesis is that the object of understanding (text, culture, myth) in the human sciences cannot be distinguished from the subject of understanding. The human subject always already belongs to the matter (text, culture, myth) which he or she wants to understand, therefore, the object does not ‘lie’ in front of the interpreter.” (Wilhelm Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, trans. Ramos J. Bentanzos (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988) (Vattimo uses this passage in the foot note of *Belief*, p. 12)

¹⁵⁴ Three ages make up Joachim’s scheme of history. They are modelled on the three persons of the Trinity. The first is the stage in which we have lived under the law; the second is that in which we live under grace; the third is one in which we shall live in a more perfect state of grace.” (*AC*, 29-30)

in the era of Spirit which is realised in post-modernity. Secularisation is an “interpretive application of the biblical message on ‘a level’ that is not strictly sacramental, sacred or ecclesiological” (AC, 48). However, it is possible to set a limit for the entire process of secularisation and *kenosis*. The hermeneutics of *kenosis* itself sets the limit of the process of secularisation. Hermeneutics is used here not to interpret gospel stories ironically, or to re-construct ancient myths, but to re-think more concretely the secularisation of Christianity as the liberation of the plurality of myths.

Commenting on Vattimo’s kenotic philosophy, and its existential relevance for post-modernity, Thomas G. Guarino¹⁵⁵ suggests that the kenotic action of God preached through hermeneutic philosophy comes to fruition in philosophy’s renunciation of strong, objective structures. Christianity adheres to charity (*caritas*) rather than making any hard claim to final truth. In kenotic Christianity, the source and paradigm of secularisation is actualised and open to further realisation.

4.1.3 *Kenosis as Caritas*

The whole history of Western thought is an ongoing struggle with the objectivism of classical metaphysics and the new philosophy represented by secularisation. However, Vattimo interprets Western history and metaphysics as a fuller realisation of God’s *kenosis*. This raises the question whether the process has any limit. Arguably, secularisation has only one limit and that is *caritas* (B, 62-65, AC, 48, and ADG, 39). This is not an end-point, or a limit that can be reached, rather it designates the dissolution of *limits*. Though the event of Christianity sets in motion the process of secularisation, it is possible to find in Scripture a limit to secularisation. Scripture is a progressive guide to desacralisation, that is, charity (ADG, 41) as the means to the spiritualisation of the biblical message and impacts on “all spheres of life as the post-modern outcome of modernisation seen effective in cultural, political, and social pluralism” (AC, 48-49). The precept ‘*Dilige, et quod vis fac*’ (Love, and do what you will) by St. Augustine, clarifies the criterion of *caritas* (B, 64). The transformation of

¹⁵⁵ Thomas G. Guarino, *Vattimo and Theology*, New York and London: T & T Clark International, 2009, p. 19.

Christianity in charity is possible through a preference for *love* rather than for the justice, severity, or the majesty of God. It is clear that the New Testament recognises this (love) as the supreme principle of humanity (B, 64). The Gospels and early Christian writers (Patrology) show the prominent virtue of charity. St. Paul speaks of three virtues, faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love.

The hermeneutical nature of *truth* is increasingly determined by agreement with others¹⁵⁶ (ADG, 43). This suggests the dissolution of truth's objectivity through *kenosis*: charity replaces truth.¹⁵⁷ If there is a truth around which we all gather, it must happen in dialogue, which in itself is the result of charity. Dialogue happens only as a result of reciprocity. Christianity moves in a direction that enhances its practical moral and dialogical charity (ADG, 44). Even Christ's message grew with history through the hermeneutical process. Accordingly, the future of Christianity is more purified and based on pure love (ADG, 45). Jesus says; "where two or more of you are gathered in my name, I will be there" (Matthew 18:20). 'In my name' can mean 'for love's sake' or 'for Christ's sake'. When gathered for the sake of love, I will be there. Thus, love, or charity is the presence of God (ADG, 45). The paradoxical representation of this is that 'Christ who was identified with truth' can be in post-modern speech and categorised as kenotic-charity¹⁵⁸ (ADG, 43, AC, 103), i.e., if forced to choose between Christ and truth, one should choose Christ.

Vattimo prefers Nietzsche to Dostoyevsky, despite the former's ironic choice for Christ at the price of truth. This is because Vattimo finds Nietzsche more faithful to the gospel especially in his announcement of the 'death of God'¹⁵⁹ (AC, 104). Nietzschean affirmation of the death of God is not merely the literal repetition of the crucifixion, but rather the affirmation of the radical expression of Dostoyevsky's paradox. Nietzsche sees it as the very meaning of the history of Europe, of the West, or of Christian modernity. "The death of the moral God marks the impossibility of

¹⁵⁶ Vattimo explains, "we do not, and perhaps cannot, agree when we have found the truth, but we may say that at least we have found some truth when we have agreed upon something." (ADG, 43)

¹⁵⁷ 'Charity taking precedence over truth' is explained in Chapter Eight.

¹⁵⁸ Vattimo uses the example of the progressive diminishing of the validity of a famous saying, "*Amicus Plato sed magis amica veritas*, (Plato is my friend, but truth is a better friend) used by Dostoyevsky. Vattimo explains; "Dostoyevsky represents a paradoxical case, since beginning with Jesus' words "*ego sum via, veritas et vita*," the inclination of Christian thought has been to identify Christ with truth, thus denying the possibility that there might be any difference between the two terms.

¹⁵⁹ Vattimo distinguishes Nietzsche's death of God, as the 'death of the moral God. "The God who has been killed by his followers is only-and rightly-the moral God." (AC, 104)

preferring truth to friendship, because the meaning of that death is that there is no ‘objective’, ontological truth that might be upheld as anything other than friendship, will to power, or subjective bond” (AC, 104-105). Those who pronounce ‘*amicus Plato sed magis amica veritas*’ do so out of ‘love’ for another, or for themselves, or for the tradition. The event of ‘truth’ reflects this pronouncement, and Heidegger’s notion of *Ereignis* finds its place here. Nietzsche’s ‘death of God’ and Heidegger’s ‘*Ereignis*’ are the most radical heirs of the anti-metaphysical (*kenotic-caritas*) principle that Christ brought into the world¹⁶⁰ (AC, 109). However, Nietzsche and Heidegger remain captive to Greek objectivism and fail to fully develop Christianity’s anti-metaphysical revolution. The redefining of Christianity in terms of anti-metaphysical revolution is possible only through charity (AC, 111). The central role of the ‘Other’ in Levinas, the philosophy of ‘communication’ in Habermas¹⁶¹, and the theory of ‘charity’ in Davidson¹⁶² contribute to the centrality of Christian *Caritas* in Vattimo. The Christian understanding of *kenotic-caritas* is an announcement from the historical event of the incarnation and speaks of the nihilistic vocation of ‘Being’. In this process “every ontic structure is weakened in favour of ontological Being, namely the *Verbum, Logos*, Word shared in the dialogue that constitutes us as historical beings” (AC, 112). Through the hermeneutic of interpretation, truth becomes charity and Being becomes an event. The biblical notions of *kenosis* and *caritas* paradoxically become the result of ‘weakening’ and ‘secularisation’ thought. Consequently, philosophy of

¹⁶⁰ Vattimo refers again to Dilthey. He observes that there is a deep Christian element in Dilthey’s ‘the history and dissolution of metaphysics. “Indeed, Dilthey writes that whereas metaphysics as a science has become impossible, the metaphysical element of our life as personal experience, that is, as moral-religious truth remains...” (AC, 109)

¹⁶¹ Jürgen Habermas considers his major contribution to be the development of the concept and theory of communicative reason or communicative rationality, which distinguishes itself from the rationalist tradition by locating rationality in structures of interpersonal linguistic communication rather than in the structure of the cosmos. This social theory advances the goals of human emancipation, while maintaining an inclusive universalist moral framework. This framework rests on the argument called universal pragmatics – that all speech acts have an inherent *telos* (the Greek word for “end”) – the goal of mutual understanding, and that human beings possess the communicative competence to bring about such understanding.

¹⁶² The principle of charity, also referred to as the principle of “rational accommodation” by Donald Davidson, entails that in each instance of interpretation, the interpreter employs a theory of belief and a theory of meaning simultaneously to identify the beliefs of the speaker. The speaker is considered a rational agent and the utterances of the speaker are accommodated as being meaningful. Davidson’s charity principle acts as a guide in the act of interpretation, which prescribes that we interpret a speaker as having true beliefs, <http://philosophyofsocialcognition.pbworks.com/w/page/16442009/Charity%20and%20interpretation>, accessed on 20/06/2014.

interpretation, according to Vattimo, has become the *koine* of Western philosophical thought.

4.1.4. Hermeneutics as *Koine*

The philosophy of interpretation today is referred to as hermeneutics and Vattimo has specified it in terms of '*Koiné*', common language, "in which philosophical thought after Heidegger and Wittgenstein, after Quine, Derrida and Ricoeur, has spread as a universal, philosophical language."¹⁶³ The term hermeneutics, a Latinized version of the Greek *hermenetice*, has been part of common language from the beginning of the seventeenth century.¹⁶⁴ This word is connected to the name of the God Hermes, the reputed messenger and interpreter of the gods. The attributed function of hermeneutics is the exegesis of sacred text, especially Christian sacred text. According to Santiago Zabala, hermeneutics not only evolved in response to the 'religious' need to determine correct rules for the valid interpretation of the Bible, but also to the 'scientific' empiricist foundationalism of logical positivism.¹⁶⁵ Zabala also describes the 'hermeneutical circle'¹⁶⁶ that articulated in the nineteenth century. This hermeneutical circularity of interpretation is essential to understanding the post-modern approach to religion. If every interpretation is itself based on another interpretation, the circle of interpretation cannot be escaped or overcome completely as is suggested by *Verwindung*.¹⁶⁷ However, for Vattimo, interpretation is conceived as a process of weakening by which the weight and eternity of objective structures and truth are weakened. Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God is an example. 'God is dead'

¹⁶³ Santiago Zabala, *Weakening Philosophy*, p. 15.

¹⁶⁴ <https://www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/>, accessed on 28/03/2014. The history of hermeneutics stretches back to ancient history where Plato used this term in his dialogues contrasting hermeneutical knowledge to that of Sophia.

¹⁶⁵ Santiago Zabala, *Weakening Philosophy*, p. 15. Logical positivism "created series of political and cultural changes, just as Martin Luther's Protestant Reformation and Thomas Kuhn's explanation of the structure of scientific revolutions did... They both showed that religious faith and scientific knowledge change not through the confrontation of the official interpretation with hard facts but by a social struggle between contending interpretations of intrinsically ambiguous evidence." (*Weakening Philosophy*, p. 15)

¹⁶⁶ "The hermeneutical circle" was first developed by Schleiermacher. Charles Taylor explains it clearly: "What are we trying to establish is a certain reading of texts or expressions, and what we appeal to as our grounds for this reading can only be other readings. The circle can also be put in terms of part-whole relations: we are trying to establish a reading for the whole text, and for this we appeal to readings of its partial expressions; yet because we are dealing with meaning, with making sense, where expressions only make sense or not in relation to others, the readings of partial expressions depend on those of others, and ultimately of the whole." (Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2*, p.18).

¹⁶⁷ Santiago Zabala, *Weakening Philosophy*, p. 16.

is not an objective 'claim' but rather 'an announcement'. Hermeneutical philosophy does not teach that 'God is dead' or that 'God does not exist', rather it announces that individual experiences have been transformed through the process of hermeneutics in language and culture so that one no longer believes in ultimate objective truth.¹⁶⁸

In *Beyond Interpretation*, Vattimo explains his argument concerning how hermeneutics has become the '*Koinè*' of Western culture. He elucidates his argument; "[T]his may of course be due, at least in part, to its weak hypothesis that does not affirm a great many precisely shared philosophical beliefs, but rather describes an overall climate, a general sensibility, or simply a kind of presupposition that everyone feels more or less obliged to take into account"¹⁶⁹ (*BI*, 1). This transition from biblical exegesis and the textual of hermeneutics to the point where it coincides with the very experience of the world is, in fact, the result of a transformation in the way truth is conceived and interpreted. This is a 'shift' of emphasis and has implications for what hermeneutics is. 'If' there is truth outside the confines of scientific method, there can be no experience of truth that is not interpretive - this is almost a truism in today's culture¹⁷⁰ (*BI*, 4-5). This is the very meaning of *koinè*.

Vattimo argues that it is impossible to prove the truth of hermeneutics without presenting it as the existential response to a history of 'Being' interpreted as the occurrence of nihilism. This argument is justified as follows: "if hermeneutics, as the philosophical theory of the interpretive character of every experience of truth, is lucid about itself, as no more than an interpretation, will it not find itself inevitably caught up in the nihilistic logic of Nietzsche's hermeneutics?" (*BI*, 7). This 'logic' may be encapsulated in the statement that there can be no recognition of the essentially interpretive character of the experience of truth without the death of God and without the fabling of the world or, what amounts to the same thing, of Being (*BI*, 7-8). Therefore, to accept hermeneutics as an interpretation and not as a metaphysical

¹⁶⁸ Santiago Zabala, *Weakening Philosophy*, p. 16.

¹⁶⁹ Vattimo says that in this generic sense of the term 'hermeneutics'; not only Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Pareyson are hermeneutical thinkers but also Habermas and Apel, Rorty and Charles Taylor, Derrida and Levinas. What brings them all together is a 'family resemblance' (to use a Wittgenstein vocabulary) or a sense of family, or a common atmosphere (*BI*, 1). However, it can be argued that hermeneutics is a philosophy developed along the Heidegger-Gadamer axis. According to them, hermeneutics reveals its constitutive characteristics: those of ontology and linguisticality. Heidegger regards interpretation primarily from the point of view of the meaning of Being and Gadamer places his emphasis primarily from the point of view of language. (*BI*, 2-3)

¹⁷⁰ Vattimo takes cues from Gadamer's *Truth and Method* to explain this.

description ‘is a matter of taste’¹⁷¹ (*BI*, 8). It is more than a choice, but ‘simply a matter of registering a taste of mind’ that remains totally inexplicable to oneself and to others (*BI*, 8). To summarise, Western philosophical schools and Vattimo arrive at the recognition of the interpretive ‘essence’ of truth by way of generalisation and by ‘a matter of taste’ that happens through the act of registering an individual taste of mind¹⁷² (*BI*, 9).

Hermeneutics is legitimate as a narrative of modernity, and above all a narrative of the meaning of ‘Being.’ In a decisive way, Vattimo through his turn to the Heideggerian ‘left’¹⁷³ has helped to make hermeneutics the hegemonic philosophy of this epoch. The Heideggerian ‘left’ refers to the forgetting of ‘Being’ and the nostalgic commitment of philosophy to its ‘recollection’. It transforms itself into Beings’ weakening/exhausting, into Being’s dissolving destiny; that is, into modernity as ‘long goodbye’ to Being.¹⁷⁴ Hermeneutics can belong to modernity only in as much as the grounds of its ‘truth’ can be set forth on the basis of the fulfilment within nihilism of the principle of reality (*BI*, 42).

In the next section of the thesis, we shall expand the arguments of Vattimo explaining Charles Taylor’s concept of secularism, but in summary, four important conclusions established are as follows: (1) Hermeneutics presents itself as the *koiné* of Western thought, as an alternative to metaphysical rationality and its claim to the objectivity of truth, (2) Nihilistic hermeneutics is constituted as an ontology of being. It presents itself as a post-metaphysical ontology of interpretation, (3) Vattimo configures his hermeneutic within the context of the Western post-Marxist democratic left with the help of Gadamerian hermeneutics, which goes back to Heidegger and Nietzsche, 4) Hermeneutical analysis re-evaluation based on the transformation of Western rationality ‘after the death of God’ to hermeneutical emancipation which is the result of the secularisation and the incarnation of the Gospel message.

¹⁷¹ “Taste” refers to communis, that is, to a historically evolved way thinking. My choice is not a subjective preference, but I am able to choose something because, I am historically situated

¹⁷² Vattimo refers to Kant and especially the Kantian theme of the transcendental function of reason, with the vital additional ingredient of the existentialist ‘discovery’ of the finitude of *Dasein* (*BI*, 9).

¹⁷³ Vattimo has recourse to Heidegger’s reading of what he calls the history of ‘Being’ as the story of a long-goodbye, of an ultimate weakening of Being. He alludes here to the left and right of Hegelian schools. By right, Vattimo means an interpretation of his overcoming metaphysics as an effort, in spite of everything, to somehow prepare a ‘return of Being’. (*BI*, P13)

¹⁷⁴ Santiago Zabala, *Weakening Philosophy*, p. 250.

Conclusion

Vattimo has not only gone beyond Nietzsche and Heidegger but pushed hermeneutics to a place that none of its founders (Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Pareyson, Ricœur, or Gadamer) ever imagined it could reach, namely of ‘weak thought’.¹⁷⁵ This hermeneutical conception of ‘weak thought’ is intended to extinguish the final flashes of metaphysics and to resist the belief that only objective knowledge and sovereign decision can guarantee peaceful co-existence. ‘Weak thought’ is an attempt to reconstruct rationality in a post-metaphysical way, opening the doors of this epoch to a construal of post-secular (*kenotic*) religious experience. It not only opens itself to an alternative direction but also re-evaluates the tradition. The relationship between God and the believer is not conceived as power-laden but as a gentler turning to new purposes (*Verwindung*). The post-secular *kenotic* God of Christianity hands over His essentialist claim to ontological truth to man. Mankind must now encounter and construct truth in his own existential circumstances. This is expressed in the ‘eventual’ nature of truth that embraces itself in the capacity to listen, to respect, and to give equal ‘freedom’ to the truth claims’ of all.

Weak thought contemplates the end of metaphysics from the religious point of view. ‘Being’ becomes an event of *Logos*. *Logos* is a ‘dialogue’, dialogue the sum of inter-subjective discourse.¹⁷⁶ Inter-subjective, dialogical weak thought facilitate a re-thinking of religion, re-positioning it to play a role in political and religious life. Christianity allows itself to be more ‘charitable’ to truth claims and Western Christianity will once again be able to respond to current political and scientific issues with a renewed spirit of enthusiasm. Vattimo insists on charity, because it can be thought of as a meta-rule that obliges us to consider different people’s practices and preferences (*FR*, 59). If charity is considered as a meta-rule and takes precedence over truth, the future of Christianity and of the Church will be to become an ever more refined disposition to charity (*FT*, 78-79). The hermeneutical opening of interpretation assists Christianity to develop its own essence as charity, not dogma. This *kenosis* of

¹⁷⁵ Santiago Zabala, *Weakening Philosophy*, p. 400.

¹⁷⁶ Gianni Vattimo and Richard Rorty, *The Future of Religion*, ed., Santiago Zabala, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 66. Hereafter this text will be cited as *FR* with corresponding page number.

individual choice allows an attitude of openness to religious cultures. Religion based on *caritas* promotes hospitality and reduces the violence of the sacred.

Vattimo aims at a *Verwindung* of Christianity, a healing, and convalescence. However, critics argue that he attempts this ‘healing’ of Christianity by referring to only a few themes such as the incarnation, death and resurrection¹⁷⁷ of Jesus. Further, his references from Scripture in dealing with such an extensive subject are limited to Jn. 15:15¹⁷⁸, and Phil. 2:7.¹⁷⁹ It is questionable whether he reads these passages in isolation from the Scriptural context. However, Vattimo’s significant contribution concerning ‘*caritas*’ should be read beyond the constraints of its theological implications. *Caritas* is openness towards the infinite interpretability of the world and opens doors of interpretation to ethical and political life. The genuinely charitable person should live ‘weak thought’ and not claim to be the custodian of truth and is tolerable towards all positions.

However, I feel that Vattimo is less than comprehensive in his interpretation of religion and is limited by his use of Nietzschean and Heideggerian ‘nihilism’. It is unexpected that he finally returns to religion,¹⁸⁰ but it is nihilism and the end of modernity that allows for a new and transformative interpretation of religion. In his understanding of Christianity, transcendence is reduced to immanence; the church is identified with the emancipated world, and revelation is equated with continued secularisation.¹⁸¹ This raises the question of whether Vattimo’s ‘weak thought’ surpasses Enlightenment notions of religion and rationality or is to be seen as the continuation and further development of that tradition. Vattimo’s approaches to violent metaphysics and the violence of the sacred raises the additional issue whether metaphysics or an articulation of the sacred is possible without violence. Is weak thought itself without violence? His ‘weak thought’ in its conceptual understanding is not an absolute principle and does

¹⁷⁷ Although, Vattimo does not use the concepts of ‘resurrection’ and ‘resurgence’, these are useful to explicate his idea of secularism. Resurgence must not be considered as equivalent to healing of an ailing body; it would be perhaps more appropriate to think of (*resourcement*), re-sourcing, a going back to the dialectical potential of within in the religion that allows as the body of practices to renew and extent itself.

¹⁷⁸ “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made know to you” (Jn 15:15 from *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version).

¹⁷⁹ “But emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Phi 2:7 from *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version).

¹⁸⁰ Please refer to 3.1 for the reasons of Vattimo’s ‘return to religion’.

¹⁸¹ Thomas G. Guarino, *Vattimo and Theology*, p. 157.

not claim to be metaphysical. However, Vattimo fails to fully justify his ‘weak claim’ because his *caritas* which operates as the hinge of secularisation can be understood as an absolute principle, i.e., a transcendent principle that limits secularisation.

I see Vattimo as not sensitive enough to see the God of Old Testament God as a loving God. There is a little justification for the textual disharmony between the Old Testament and the New Testament that Vattimo tries to identify (the God of the OT as metaphysical and violent, and the God of the NT as incarnated *kenosis*, secularisation and *caritas*) (*B*, 83 and *AC*, 37). I also feel that he neglects the religious experience of people who are devoted believers, because he is less than charitable and sceptical of traditional religious beliefs in his hermeneutical interpretation of Christianity. This does violence to a conventional religious believer. Vattimo only concentrates on the kenotic dimension of Christianity and fails to see the aspect of resurrection of the body. Emptying comes to fulness through resurrection. His concepts of ‘weak thought’ and ‘secularisation’ cannot be articulated as definitive philosophical positions, but rather as possible deliberative possibilities for future development.

The vagueness of Vattimo’s philosophical position on ‘secularism’ is improved in Charles Taylor’s work. Taylor’s conception of secularism is broader than Vattimo’s. Vattimo’s version can be faulted for being nihilistic and prey to Christian apologetics. Taylor takes his cues from historical and traditional narratives. Taylor also traces ‘the epiphany’ of secularism to the overcoming of ‘epistemology’, while for Vattimo, secularisation is the result of the overcoming ‘metaphysics’ and ‘being’ (*Verwindung*). I argue in Part Three (with the help of Taylor) that ‘secularism’ and ‘secularisation’ do not merely involve ‘the church-state separation’ and ‘the alienation of religion from the state’ but an opening towards new potentials of beliefs in the modern world. As we shall see, Taylor reflexively posits a notion of ‘the self’ that undergoes an irreversible process of development culminating in the formation of ‘the secular self’. The self evolves and eventually leads to a shift from the enchanted (porous) to the disenchanted (buffered) sense of self. For Taylor, the Reformation provides the key to the historical moment concerning the formation of ‘the buffered self’. He sees the ‘immanent frame’ that operates within a disenchanted world as logically unavoidable, and as underpinning the power of the mainstream secularisation theory. Within this frame, each human is charged with finding his or her own way of being human (Nova Effect), and their own spiritual path. Thus, Taylor visualises the possibility of a ‘a leap of faith’ and

‘conversion’ within the ‘immanent frame’ which with regard to transcendence in itself is poised between closure and openness. As I shall explain, Taylor’s most important achievement is not to negate transcendence but to explain the possibility of the transcendent in terms of a hermeneutic of ‘secularity’.

PART – III

RE-THINKING SECULARISATION

“None of us grasps the whole picture. None of us could ever grasp alone everything that is involved in our alienation from God and his action to bring us back. But there are a great many of us, scattered throughout history, who have had some powerful sense of this drama” (SA, 754).

Introduction

The increasing reappearance and re-evaluation of religion has led to a complex series of philosophical interventions. As Eduard Mendieta and Jonathan Vanantwerpen note, “the very categories of the religious and the secular- and secularism and religion - are being revisited, reworked, and rethought.”¹⁸² Along with Vattimo, Taylor¹⁸³ initiates a radical revisiting of ‘the mainstream secularisation theory’. He introduces an alternative ‘reform master narrative’ (SA, 267-269).¹⁸⁴

Taylor’s ‘reform master narrative’ is the completion of and an improvement on Vattimo’s ‘weak thought’. Vattimo’s dialogical, non-foundationalist approach to metaphysics and modernity aids understanding Taylor’s secularism. Vattimo’s ‘weak thought’ and ‘secularism’ cannot be articulated as a definitive philosophical position, but rather as a possible resource for further development. In Vattimo, transcendence is arguably reduced to immanence and the sacred is subjected to the violence of critique. Taylor, through his historical and genealogical analysis of ‘the immanent frame’, offers a broader approach to the transcendent. Taylor improves on Vattimo’s philosophical position concerning secularisation as an event within Christianity, the

¹⁸² Eduard Mendieta and Jonathan Vanantwerpen, *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, eds., Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2011, p. 1.

¹⁸³ Ruth Abbey describes Taylor as “one of the most influential and prolific philosophers in the English-speaking world.” Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor: Philosophy Now*, ed., Teddington: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2000, p. 1.

¹⁸⁴ Taylor’s concept of secularism is limited to those “who lived and live in the West, or perhaps Northwest, or North Atlantic world – although secularity extends also partially and in different ways beyond this world.” (SA, 1)

hermeneutic of *Verwindung*, weak ontology, limitlessness of *kenosis* and *Caritas*, and the interminability of Nietzschean death of God.¹⁸⁵

Taylor's formation of the modern-secular-self and genealogy of secularisation in the West are the core concerns of this section of the thesis. These attempt to re-evaluate how we think and imagine 'belief' and 'religious experience'. Taylor opposes traditional secularisation theory in which the decline of religious belief is initiated by the incompatibility of modernity with religion.

Taylor's 'master narrative' too is not a return to the magnification of faith but to re-capturing the wonder of faith. His method involves "tracking back and forth between the analytical and historical" (SA, 29). José Casanova describes Taylor's secularism as analytical, phenomenological, and genealogical.¹⁸⁶ "Analytically, it explains the structural interlocking of the cosmic, social, and moral orders that constitute the self-sufficient immanent frame within which we are constrained to live and experience our lives, secular as well as religious."¹⁸⁷ It is phenomenological because of his unique sense of 'secularity' and his notion of 'fullness'. It is genealogical because "Taylor unabashedly presents his account as a 'master narrative' which he defines as a 'broad framework of how history unfolds'" (SA, 573).¹⁸⁸ His goal is not to describe the 'conditions of belief' as a descriptive *what*, nor as a chronological *when*, but rather to track back to an analytic *how*. His secularism is about the modern transformation and deconstruction of religion as a construction of the self that gradually evolves as 'the secular self'. The anthropocentric self, aware of its capacity to reflectively disengage (SA, 42) is responsible for Taylor's unique concept of 'secularityiii'.

The 'formation of the secular self' and secularityiii are elucidated in Part Three of this thesis. It is divided into two chapters and four segments: (1) the background to Taylor's secularism, (2) his attempt at overcoming epistemology and the epiphany of secularism, (3) a re-appraisal of the sources of secularity, and (4) the development of secularityiii. These are presented as strands of a unified philosophical project.

¹⁸⁵ The philosophical substance of these points is explained in Chapter Seven.

¹⁸⁶ José Casanova, "A Secular Age: Dawn or Twilight?" in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, eds., Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen and Craig Calhoun, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010, pp. 265-281.

¹⁸⁷ José Casanova, "A Secular Age: Dawn or Twilight?", pp. 265-281.

¹⁸⁸ David Storey, "Charles Taylor's Secular Age: Breaking the Spell of the Immanent Frame", in *Rethinking Secularisation: Philosophy and the Prophecy of a Secular Age*, eds., Herbert De Vriese and Gary Gabar, Cambridge: Cambridge School of Publishing, 2009, pp. 179-218.

Chapter Five offers an insight into Taylor's philosophy. It explains the self-interpretability and dialogical nature of 'the individual self' and traces the sources of secularity by 'overcoming' traditional epistemology. He uses epistemology in a deconstructive way as 'closed world structure' (CWS). Chapter Six argues that Taylor's notion of 'the self' undergoes an irreversible process of progressive evolution leading to the formation of 'the secular self'. It is the result of a constant evolving that initiates a shift from the enchanted¹⁸⁹ to the disenchanted self. For Taylor, the Reformation is the key to the formation of 'the buffered self'. Social imaginaries structure the way people imagine themselves within the modern moral order. His account of the development of 'secularityiii' is explained in relation to Exclusive Humanism¹⁹⁰, the Nova Effect, and the Age of Authenticity. Taylor's 'immanent frame', exposed to 'openness' and 'closure', is explicated as logically unavoidable and is that which underpins the power of the mainstream secularisation theory.

¹⁸⁹ 'Enchantment', 'disenchantment', 'porousness', and 'bufferedness' are introduced as modes of 'the self's' development. These concepts are explained in chapters five and six.

¹⁹⁰ 'Exclusive Humanism', 'the Nova Effect', and 'the Age of Authenticity' are presented by Taylor linking to his 'grand narrative' of secularism. These concepts are explained in Chapters Five and Six.

CHAPTER FIVE

RE-THINKING SECULARISATION

5.1 Taylor's Life and Influences

In his book entitled *Charles Taylor: Thinking and Living the Deep Diversity*,¹⁹¹ Mark Redhead argues that Taylor's confrontation with political fragmentation¹⁹² is firmly shaped by his intellectual, political and spiritual engagements particularly, his identity as a bi-cultural¹⁹³ citizen in Canada. Intellectual, spiritual, and political engagements inter-twin in Taylor's life. His Catholicism aided him towards politics, and his intellectual endeavours.¹⁹⁴ As was the case with Vattimo,¹⁹⁵ the intellectual, political and spiritual aspects of Taylor's life frame the foundation of his approach to secularism.

Nicholas H. Smith observes that Taylor's life and philosophy demonstrate his confrontation with the philosophy of 'actuality'.¹⁹⁶ Following Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, Taylor argues that it is a mistake to presuppose that an understanding of the world is primarily mediated by representations. It is only through an unarticulated background that representations can make sense. For Charles Guignon,¹⁹⁷ Taylor sees in Wittgenstein and Heidegger "a new type of inquiry into the conditions for the possibility of intentionality," indeed, a type of "quasi-transcendental

¹⁹¹ Mark Redhead, *Charles Taylor: Thinking and Living Deep Diversity*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC., 2002, p. 16.

¹⁹² Redhead observes that Taylor's life was a constant struggle to mediate the contrasting normative forces at work within the context of political fragmentation. Redhead defines a politically fragmented state as "one whose members increasingly identify with the concerns of specific groups rather than the country as a whole" (Mark Redhead, *Charles Taylor: Thinking and Living Deep Diversity*, p. 1).

¹⁹³ Redhead describes Taylor as a "bicultural subject" because Taylor was the son of an English-speaking father and a French speaking mother. He grew up in Quebec in a bilingual household.

¹⁹⁴ Mark Redhead, p. 16.

¹⁹⁵ Frederek Depoortere observes that Vattimo's philosophical life was the result of the three different but related realm of politics, philosophy, and religion.

¹⁹⁶ Nicholas H. Smith, *Charles Taylor: Meaning, Morals and Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002, p. 11.

¹⁹⁷ Charles Guignon, "Philosophy after Wittgenstein and Heidegger", in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 50, 1990, pp. 649-672.

inquiry.”¹⁹⁸ Taylor sees Wittgenstein, like Heidegger, as a philosopher challenging the Enlightenment picture of human agency as essentially disengaged, and monological,¹⁹⁹ offers instead a conception of an embodied, dialogical and practice-embedded agency.

Taylor elucidates a new moral order as a response to the domestic and international disorder brought about by the wars of religion. He relies on John Locke and Hugo Grotius to explain this development²⁰⁰ and distinguishes between paleo-Durkheimian, neo-Durkheimian, and post-Durkheimian²⁰¹ social forms. This is based on the insight that religion is always an expression of the society in which it exists, as well as being an essential form that creates and sustains the society. Robert N. Bellah remarks; “Taylor uses this typology to characterise the relation of people with religion as it is brought out in the way they practice it in accord or discord with the community, that is, with the state.”²⁰² Now let us see how Taylor develops his notion of ‘the self’.

5.2 Man as Self-Interpreting Animal

Taylor’s distinctive philosophical interest distinguishes him from other hermeneutical philosophers. The methodology of hermeneutics does not seem to be his principal concern. As Smith explains, “it is meaning, not the reflective act of interpretation, and meaning in relation to human existence, rather than to literary texts, that is first in the

¹⁹⁸ Charles Guignon, “Philosophy after Wittgenstein and Heidegger”, pp. 649-672.

¹⁹⁹ Charles Guignon, pp. 649-672.

²⁰⁰ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004, p. 3. Hereafter this text will be cited as *SI* with corresponding page number.

²⁰¹ A *paleo-Durkheimian* social form is one in which religion is deeply embedded in the entire social structure such that it is not a differentiated sphere, nor even a very partial one. In this sense, most pre-modern religions would be paleo-Durkheimian, and for Taylor’s purposes medieval Europe would be an example of this form. A *neo-Durkheimian* social form is one in which religion is partially disembedded from the traditional social structure of kinship and village life but comes to serve as an expression of a larger social identity, namely the newly emerging nation state in the West. Then Taylor posits a *post-Durkheimian* social form in which radical individualism no longer relates to a social form. Individuals are oriented to their own very diverse forms of spirituality and no longer think of their religion in terms of overarching social formations. Of course, Taylor argues that post-Durkheimian forms never wholly replace earlier ones, which continue to exist, sometimes with a significant influence, as is the case of neo-Durkheimianism in the United States, though most of Europe is post-Durkheimian. <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2007/11/23/after-durkheim/>, accessed on 02/02/2015.

²⁰² Robert N. Bellah, *A Secular Age: After Durkheim*, <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2007/11/23/after-durkheim/>, accessed on 22/02/2015.

order of Taylor's concerns...."²⁰³ He is concerned with 'any science' that can be called 'hermeneutical' and which deals with "one or another of the confusingly interrelated forms of meaning."²⁰⁴ The notion of 'meaning' plays a central role in the characterisation of human beings at the phenomenological level of ordinary speech. Taylor explains:

[T]here is a quite legitimate notion of meaning which we use when we speak of the meaning of a situation for an agent. And that this concept has a place is integral to our ordinary consciousness and hence speech about our actions. Our actions are ordinarily characterized by the purpose sought and explained by desires, feelings, and emotions. But the language by which we describe our goals, feelings, desires is also a definition of the meaning things have for us. Moreover, our understanding of these terms moves inescapably in a hermeneutical circle (*PP2*, 19).

This includes first, "an object or field of objects, about which we can speak in terms of coherence or its absence, of making sense or nonsense" (*PP2*, 15). Secondly, it is a distinction made between sense, or coherence, "and its embodiment in a field of carriers or signifiers" (*PP2*, 15). Thus, 'meaning' can admit more than one 'expression' of a subject interpreted. Taylor, further makes a distinction between 'meaning' and 'expression'.

This distinction can only be relative because there can be occasions where no clear difference can be drawn between what is said and its expression. It can be argued that this is the fundamental and normal condition of meaningful expression. Nevertheless, this according to Taylor, does not fully do away with the distinction between meaning and expression. There is also a third condition for any science to become hermeneutical, and that is 'sense' (*PP2*, 16) which is "distinguishable from its expression, which is for or by a subject" (*PP2*, 17).

In advance of the explanation of how these conditions are realised in the 'sciences of man', Taylor enumerates the relevance of having the right understanding of the "science of man as hermeneutical" and human beings as "self-interpreting animals."²⁰⁵ He explains:

I believe that what we are as human agents is profoundly interpretation-dependent, that human beings in different cultures can be radically diverse, in keeping with their

²⁰³ Nicholas H. Smith, "Taylor and the Hermeneutic Tradition", in *Charles Taylor: Contemporary Philosophy in Focus*, ed., Ruth Abbey, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 29-51.

²⁰⁴ Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Papers 2, Philosophy and Human Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 15. Hereafter this text will be cited as *PP2* with corresponding page number.

²⁰⁵ Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Papers 1, Human Agency and Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 45. Hereafter this text will be cited as *PP1* with corresponding page number.

fundamentally different self-understandings. But I think that a constant is to be found in the shape of the questions that all cultures must address.²⁰⁶

According to Nicholas H. Smith, this ‘right understanding’ is an answer to the questions; “what interpretations are interpretations of” and “what interpretation tells us about human existence.”²⁰⁷ For Taylor, interpretation is not carried out in isolation. It hinges on the language one receives from society and culture. “What interpretations are interpretations of” is at its root an epistemological issue about ‘meaning’, but “what interpretations tells us about human existence” is an ontological issue. Taylor observes “that it is an ontological issue which has been argued ever since the seventeenth century in terms of epistemological considerations” (PP2, 17). The response to the question of what interpretations are interpretations of, is ‘meaning’. “A successful interpretation is one which makes clear the meaning originally present in a confused, fragmentary, cloud form” (PP2, 17). Something is meaningful that has *prima facie* or potential meaning, needing to be interpreted. The potential purpose of interpretation is to bring out that meaning or make it more vivid.

Thus, according to Germain McKenzie-Gonzalez, Taylor’s account of self-interpretation is not arbitrary. It “refers to ‘purposes’ humans give to themselves, which guide their actions and efforts.”²⁰⁸ The implied purposefulness of humans is teleological in the sense that ordinary language also possesses purpose and goals that guide our actions. Such purposefulness, according to Taylor makes man a being-in-dialogue. “Man is above all a language-animal” (PP1, 216). It is through dialogical relationships and conversations that one becomes human. Taylor explains; “the re-discovery of my own identity doesn’t mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others... My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others.”²⁰⁹

Consequently, the narrative nature presupposes self-interpretability of human identity. It means that “human existence is expressive of and constituted by ‘meanings’ shaped

²⁰⁶ Charles Taylor, “The Moral Topography of the Self,” in *Hermeneutics and Psychological Theory: Interpretive Perspectives on Personality, Psychotherapy, and Psychopathology*, eds., Stanley B. Messer Louis A. Sass, and Robert L. Woolfolk, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988, pp. 298-320.

²⁰⁷ Nicholas H. Smith, “Taylor and the Hermeneutic Tradition”, pp. 29-51.

²⁰⁸ Germain McKenzie-Gonzalez, *Charles Taylor’s Hermeneutical View of the Social Sciences*, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC., 2015. (This is not a completed work)

²⁰⁹ Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 231. Hereafter this text will be cited as *PA* with corresponding page number.

by self-interpretations.”²¹⁰ This ontological thesis is fundamental to Taylor’s philosophy of secularism. McKenzie-Gonzalez observes that human “narratives are individually constructed in dialogue with the other, society, and in the context of a given culture.”²¹¹ From this perspective, Taylor’s secularity is justified as follows:

I have tried to give a master narrative of secularity. And one of the central ideas is that one only understands what secularity is through the narrative. The aim is to criticize, and perhaps replace, a widespread understanding of secularity as the inevitable by-product of modernization, however this is understood. Generally, it is seen as consisting of processes like economic growth, industrialization, social and geographical mobility, urbanization, the development of science and technology, the advance of instrumental reason and the like (SA, 28-29).

Smith observes that Taylor’s ‘sciences of man’ are “developed in plural and contingent ways across history and between cultures that need to be examined as such through a hermeneutic reflection.”²¹² Accordingly, ‘hermeneutical reflection’ is the key to Taylor’s philosophy. It serves as the source of his socio-political-philosophical arguments. Vattimo also identifies hermeneutics as the *Koiné* in which ‘the technic of hermeneutic’ has spread as a universal philosophical language.

The hermeneutic nature of Taylor’s ‘social science’ has its philosophical background in Dilthey’s *Verstehen* orientated to social science.²¹³ *Verstehen* means ‘reaching an understanding’. Dilthey was the founder of this *Verstehensphilosophie*. It was improved by Heidegger (PP2, 15) and Gadamer, who refined it and identified it as ‘philosophical hermeneutics’. It “is a way of thinking about social sciences as essentially interpretive”.²¹⁴ Hermeneutics is used as a tool to ‘overcome epistemology’ that aids to trace the source of ‘secularity’.

5. 3 Overcoming Epistemology: Epiphany of Secularism

In his preface to *Philosophical Arguments*, Taylor observes that the Cartesian tradition privileges the problem of knowledge before proceeding to learn and philosophise about God, the world, or human life (PA, vii). Taylor’s argument relates to the nature of knowledge as all deliberations on God and the world represent a knowledge claim.

²¹⁰ Nicholas H. Smith, “Taylor and the Hermeneutic Tradition”, pp. 29-51.

²¹¹ Germain McKenzie-Gonzalez, “Charles Taylor’s Hermeneutical View of the Social Sciences”.

²¹² Nicholas H. Smith, “Taylor and the Hermeneutic Tradition”, pp. 29-51.

²¹³ Nicholas H. Smith, *Charles Taylor: Meaning, Morals and Modernity*, p. 120.

²¹⁴ Nicholas H. Smith, p.121.

Taylor sees this Cartesian bias towards giving epistemology ‘pride of place’ as an illusion. Taylor states, “[e]pistemology, once the pride of modern philosophy seems in a bad way today” (PA,1).

Taylor attempts a retrospective analysis of epistemology. Hubert L. Dreyfus defines epistemology as a study of that radical gap between what is inside the mind and what is outside in the world, for a subject to have knowledge of the world.²¹⁵ The heart of epistemology is a belief in a *foundational* enterprise (PA, 2).²¹⁶ Epistemology claims to clarify what makes knowledge valid and what that validity consists in. Classical epistemologists take their cue from what were identified as the successful sciences of their day. However, Taylor observes that the arguments about the source of valid knowledge were not supposed to be empirical. It is because, “the actual foundational science was not itself supposed to be dependent on any of the empirical sciences, and this was obviously on pain of a circularity that would sacrifice its foundational character” (PA, 2). To overcome epistemology requires overcoming foundationalism.

Ruth Abbey states, “Taylor’s aim in overcoming epistemology is not to jettison this (foundationalist) approach to knowledge outright but to restore it to its proper, limited space. He wants to resituate rather than repudiate the epistemological model.”²¹⁷ “Not to jettison...but to restore” can be read in relation to Vattimo’s *Verwindung* of metaphysics. In this respect, Taylor takes cues from Hegel, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein. He questions three notions associated with epistemology: (1) ‘the picture of the subject as ideally disengaged’, free and rational. (2) ‘the punctual view of the self’²¹⁸ and (3) the social consequence of the first two: an atomistic explanation of society as constituted by or ultimately to be explained in terms of, individual purposes (atomism) (PA, 7). Taylor approaches these three notions by illustrating how the epistemological tradition relates to some of the most controversial spiritual ideas of the preceding centuries. The first entails a classical dualism in which the subject withdraws from the body. It involves the displacement of the subject from the world.

²¹⁵ Hubert L. Dreyfus, “Taylor’s (Anti-) Epistemology” in *Charles Taylor: Contemporary Philosophy in Focus*, ed., Ruth Abbey, Teddington: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2000, pp. 52-83.

²¹⁶ Taylor takes his cues from Rorty’s book, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. (Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton: 1979, p.132.)

²¹⁷ Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor: Philosophy Now*, p. 178.

²¹⁸ Punctual view of the self is ideally ready as free and rational to treat the world and even some of the features of his own character-instrumentally, as subject to change and reorganisation in order to secure the welfare of himself and others (PA, 7).

The second originates in the ideals concerning both the government and reform of the self. The third also acquired from social-contract theories of the seventeenth century, re-appears in many of the assumptions of contemporary liberalism and mainstream social science (PA, 7-8). For Taylor, it is vital to overcome these ideals. This means coming to grips with epistemology by considering representationalism in relation to foundationalism (PA, 8).

5.3.1 Foundationalism and Representationalism

The word ‘foundationalism’²¹⁹ is associated in epistemology with giving *apriori* status to the theory of knowledge. Its goal is to validate and render certain knowledge claims. Taylor observes that foundationalist reasoning is meant to be shaken loose from the parochial perspective, i.e., detached from the peculiarly human perspective on things. For example, the condemnation of secondary qualities to describe reality that is no longer in anthropocentric terms but in ‘absolute’ (PA, 40). Overcoming epistemology means “abandoning foundationalism” (PA, 2).

Representationalism is defined as “the philosophical position that the world we see in conscious experience is not the real world itself, but an internal representation of that world. We know only our ideas or interpretations of objects in the world. The veil of perception prevents first-hand knowledge of anything beyond it.”²²⁰ Ruth Abbey defines representationalism as “conception of knowledge as occurring when humans form inner mental pictures or representations of the outside world. The truth or accuracy of the knowledge generated depends on how exactly they fit between the inner representations and the independent reality they portray.”²²¹ Taylor does not consider this inner-outer dichotomy indicative of a Cartesian dualism but as broader

²¹⁹ Foundationalism is a view in epistemology that knowledge must be regarded as a structure raised upon secure, certain foundations. These are found in some combination of experience and reason, with different schools (empiricism, rationalism) emphasizing the role of one over that of the other. Foundationalism was associated with the ancient Stoics, and in the modern era with Descartes, who discovered his foundations in the ‘clear and distinct’ ideas of reason, <http://philosophy.enacademic.com/959/foundationalism>, accessed on 12/03/2014).

²²⁰ http://www.philosophybasics.com/branch_representationalism.html, accessed on 28/10/2014.

²²¹ Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor: Philosophy Now*, p. 174.

than the epistemological theory that claims, “knowledge is the correct representation of an independent reality” (PA, 3).

Taylor is influenced by Immanuel Kant, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Ludwig Wittgenstein and their dislike of the moral and spiritual consequences of traditional epistemology.²²² Their arguments find their source in Kant’s “argument from transcendental conditions.”²²³ They start from the intuition that the central phenomenon of ‘experience’ or ‘the clearing’ is not made intelligible by the epistemological explanation in either its empiricist or rationalist variants (PA, 9).²²⁴ The latter offer incoherent knowledge. Representations are self-enclosed, i.e., they cannot be identified and described in abstraction from the ‘outside’ world and yet nevertheless point toward and represent things in that outside world (PA, 9).

Taylor gives a rather different view of what it means to overcome epistemology. (PA, 13). The Canadian Philosopher explains:

[O]vercoming the distorted anthropological beliefs through a critique and correction of the construal of knowledge that is interwoven with them and has done so much to give them undeserved credit, ...and through a clarification of the conditions of intentionality, we come to a better understanding of what we are as knowing agents – and hence also as language – and thereby gain insight into some of the crucial anthropological questions that underpin our moral and spiritual beliefs (PA, 14).

This critique and overcoming of epistemology opens a possibility for having better knowledge of the knowing agent himself/herself. Though Taylor intends a radical

²²² Taylor explains their positions in P.8 of *Philosophical Arguments*. “Hegel in the introduction to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, speaks of a ‘fear of error’ that reveals itself rather than as fear of the truth’. He shows how this stance is bound up with a certain aspiration to individuality and separateness, refusing what he sees as the “truth” of subject-object identity. Heidegger infamously treats the rise of the modern epistemological standpoint as a stage in the development of a stance of dominion to the world, which culminates in contemporary technology society. Merleau-Ponty draws more explicitly political connections and clarifies the alternative notion of freedom that arises from the critique of empiricism and intellectualism. The moral consequences of the devastating critique of epistemology in the later Wittgenstein are less evident, since he was strongly averse to making this kind of thing explicit” (PA, 8).

²²³ Taylor explains “the argument from transcendental conditions” as; “we argue the inadequacy of the epistemological construal, and the necessity of a new conception, from what we show to be the indispensable conditions of there being anything like experience or awareness of the world in the first place.” (PA, 9)

²²⁴ “Kant speaks of ‘experience’ where as Heidegger with his concern to get beyond subjective formulations, ends up talking about the “clearing” (*Lichtung*). Where the Kantian expression focuses on the mind of the subject and the conditions of having what we can call experience, the Heideggerian formulation points us towards another facet of the same phenomenon, the fact that anything can *appear* or come to light at all. This requires that there be a being *to* whom it appears, *for* whom it is an object; it requires a knower, in some sense.” (PA, 9)

discontinuity with tradition in this overcoming, in one respect there is still a continuity.

He argues:

it carries forward the demand for self-clarity about our nature as knowing agents, by adopting a better and more critically defensible notion of what it entails. Instead of searching for an impossible foundational justification of knowledge or hoping to achieve total reflexive clarity about the bases of our beliefs, we would now conceive this self-understanding as awareness of the limits and conditions of our knowing, an awareness that would help us to overcome the illusions of disengagement and atomic individuality and instrumental reason (*PA*, 14).

This allows the epistemological project both a measure of ‘self-responsible reason’ and a new meaning. Husserl thinks of this as struggling to realise the fundamental task of achieving reflexive clarity.²²⁵ Furthermore, the fact that we are agents and embodied beings means that we live on earth in a qualitatively different way than disembodied beings. In the words of Ruth Abbey, “the body is both an enabling and constraining feature in our knowledge. It limits, for example, the ways in which we can perceive the world. We are, moreover, always orientated in space by being embodied, so that spatial orientation is a vital component of human experience.”²²⁶

The reference here is the relationship between engaged, embodied identity and representational knowledge. For Taylor, engaged, embodied identity is prior to, and indeed the precondition of representational knowledge. The representational approach to knowledge must be founded on this wiser way of being in the world. Taylor makes it possible by appreciating the significance and normality of engaged, embodied identity.

5.3.2 Embodied and Engaged Agent/Knowledge

There is a weakening (not in the same sense as Vattimo’s -diminishing) consensus among philosophers about the need to overcome the epistemological legacy of the scientific revolution. There is a disagreement over what overcoming means and what thereafter.²²⁷ His aim is not a radical overcoming (*Überwindung*) but a work of restoring ‘it’ to its proper and limited space (*Verwindung*). Taylor explains:

²²⁵ Taylor observes that Husserl conceived this critical project in his last great lectures on the “crisis of European science”, given in Vienna in 1935.

²²⁶ Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor: Philosophy Now*, p. 180.

²²⁷ Ruth Abbey, p. 178. Abbey illustrates in an endnote the debate between Taylor and Rorty on what it means to overcome epistemology. Taylor accuses Rorty of being “in the thrall of a latter-day variant of this picture; and this fuels my desire to hurl at him the accusation we are constantly exchanging: of

[T]he disengaged identity is far from being simply wrong and misguided, and besides, we are all too deeply imbued with it to be able really, and authentically to repudiate it. The kind of critique we need is one that can free it of its illusory pretensions to define the totality of our lives as agents, without attempting the futile and ultimately self-destructive task of rejecting it altogether (*PPI*, 7).

For Taylor, the “approach to knowledge is embedded within a prior ontology of engaged, embodied agency, from which it tries to abstract itself.”²²⁸ This engaged, embodied nature is the primordial feature of human existence that has been veiled by the traditional epistemological model. Here Taylor is under the influence of Hegel and observes that embodiment is fundamental to subjectivity.²²⁹ Being embodied, humans experience the universe differently from a disembodied being. The human body enables, constrains, and limits knowing. However, embodiment also helps the human to be oriented in space which is an essential aspect of human experience. Taylor defines the embodied agent as one who,

[...] acts to maintain equilibrium upright, who can deal with things close-up immediately, and has to move to get things farther away, who can grasp certain kinds of things easily and others not, can remove certain obstacles and not others, can move to make a scene more perspicuous; and so on (*PA*, 62).

He understands humans as focused on the world; as beings with a definitive purpose. “[T]his picture of the embodied agency challenges not just the tendency towards minimising the body’s impact on ordinary ways of knowing but also the very possibility of an inner/outer separation that characterises the representational approach to knowledge.”²³⁰ It is not just knowledge about the world alone that Taylor discusses when he talks about embodiment. He includes self-knowledge and self-interpretation.

Through his account of engaged, embodied agency/knowledge, Taylor postulates a different type of knowledge claim. As Abbey explains, “Taylor’s concern in dealing with representational epistemology is not only to unearth its own enabling conditions that reside in a more ordinary way of knowing and doing, but also to draw attention to the concept of the tacit background itself.”²³¹ Taylor’s explanation stretches from engaged embodiment and ordinary coping at one end to a highly abstract, disengaged

being still too much mired in the bad old ways” (Rorty in the Epistemological Tradition. In *Reading Rorty*, A. Malachowski, ed., Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990, 257-75.)

²²⁸ Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor: Philosophy Now*, p. 179

²²⁹ Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 567, and 571. See also Ruth Abbey, p. 180.

²³⁰ Ruth Abbey, p. 180.

²³¹ Ruth Abbey refers to ‘the tacit background’ or sometimes just ‘the background’ as the unarticulated, unacknowledged, but vitally important assumptions, abilities and practices that underlie any activity (p.183).

scientific theorizing at the other. It articulates the relationship between the tacit background and reflective, theoretical knowledge. Disengaged knowledge can be explained as “highly self-conscious and artificial. It strives for a sort of understanding that does not come readily. Engaged embodiment is the opposite of its knowing. It expresses itself in a doing that is unreflective and unselfconscious.”²³² However, “the disengaged model relies on engaged embodiment for its realisation. While it strives to think of the world in a disembodied, disinterested way, it still reposes upon and relies on the ordinary abilities of coping in the world.”²³³ This knowledge pattern evades the ontologizing mistakes that Taylor attributes to epistemology’s disengaged theorizing is one, rather than the only type of knowledge. In addition, he acknowledges its dependence on a more primitive and ordinary way of being and doing in the world.²³⁴ The inevitable entanglement of the disengaged/disembodied from the engaged/embodied, and its (disengaged agents’) reliance on ordinary coping, prompts Taylor advocate an ‘ontologising the disengaged’. Taylor tries to overcome the constrictions of disengaged agent/knowledge through ‘ontologising the disengaged’.

5.3.3 Ontologising the Disengaged

Taylor explains the disengaged subject as “free and rational to the extent that one has fully distinguished himself from the natural and social worlds, so that his identity is solely defined in terms of what lies outside him in these worlds. The subject even withdraws from one’s own body, which one is able to look on as an object” (*PA*, 7). Rational can be another word for disengaged that seems to distance itself from the ordinary and embodied.

Taylor, while acknowledging the consequences of the erosion of belief, postulates the possibility that the notion of a disengaged self can be positive. This new ‘localization’ of self explains the self-defining nature of the modern self. The concept of the self as totally becoming an object to itself, and detaching itself from the cosmic-moral-absolute that surrounds it, brings forth the image of the self as disengaged.²³⁵ The modern sense of self involves the faith that one can understand and define oneself without reference

²³² Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor: Philosophy Now*, p. 184.

²³³ Ruth Abbey, p. 185.

²³⁴ Ruth Abbey, p. 185.

²³⁵ Taylor, *Hegel*, p. 6, and Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor: Philosophy Now*, pp.81-82.

to any aspect of wider reality. Hence the image of the modern self as disengaged.²³⁶ The disengaged self does not perceive itself as oriented towards any cosmic order, the self makes of its world an object.²³⁷

Taylor presents disengagement as both mental and intellectual. The mind prescind its involvement in ordinary existence and aspires to a more detached, disinterested perspective on the world (SS, 149). The most important feature of this doctrine is that it engages both a moral ideal as well as an epistemological doctrine. Disengaged knowledge orients humans towards strong evaluations and aims at a monopoly of the knowledge of self and the world.

The representationalist account of scientific knowledge has expanded into a theory of knowledge. A limited approach to understanding has become normalised as an approach to all knowledge. Taylor describes this as ontologising the disengaged perspective by reading it into the constitution of mind itself.²³⁸ It is “the dominant conception of the thinking agent that both Heidegger and Wittgenstein had to overcome shaped by a kind of ontologising of the rational procedure. That is, what were the proper procedures of rational thought were read into the very constitution of the mind and made parts of its very structure” (PA, 61). Ontologising the disengaged perspective took two major forms: dualism and monistic mechanism.²³⁹ Taylor explains,

With the decline over centuries in the credibility of dualism, mechanism has gained ground. But what has helped to underpin the credibility of both, or rather of the view that sees them as the only two viable alternatives, is the power of the disengaged model of mind, which draws on the prestige of the procedures of disengagement, channelling its authority into a picture of the mind. What I called the ontologizing move brings about this transfer (PA, 67).

Disengagement involves breaking free from the perspective of embodied experience in dualistic form. Dualistic form provides disproportionate importance to the senses and

²³⁶ Taylor, *Hegel*, pp. 6-7.

²³⁷ Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 188. Hereafter this text will be cited as SS with corresponding page number. Taylor postulates “a new understanding of subject and object, where the subject is, as it were, over against the object. Indeed, we could say that the very notions of subject and object in their modern sense come to be within this new localization. The modern sense is one in which subject and object are separable entities. That is, in principle-though perhaps not in fact-one could exist without the other.” (P.188)

²³⁸ Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor: Philosophy Now*, p. 176, (PA, 61, 66).

²³⁹ Taylor holds that mental acts simply are mechanic events. “This idea is given its modern form in Hobbes, and thus has just as long a pedigree as the Cartesian alternative. Mechanism can do as well as dualism to underpin the disengaged perspective, because the underlying belief was that we need to attain this perspective in order to do justice to a mechanistic universe.” (PA, 66-67)

imagination in our account of knowing. In the monistic mechanism, thinking is an event realised in a body. Like dualism, mechanism underpins the disengaged perspective, because this perspective is necessary to do justice to a mechanistic world (*PA*, 67).

In the process of transposition or ontologising, “one particular way of knowing becomes inflated into all knowing.”²⁴⁰ Taylor argues,

It would be carrying further the demand for self-clarity about our nature as knowing subjects, by adopting a better and more critically defensible notion of what it entails. Instead of searching for an impossible foundational justification of knowledge or hoping to achieve total reflexive clarity about the bases of our beliefs, we would now conceive this as awareness about the limits and conditions of our knowing, an awareness that would help us to overcome the illusions of disengagement that are constantly being generated by civilization founded on mobility and instrumental reason (*PA*, 14).

Transposition or ontologising is perceived as the awareness and the attempt to surpass the limitations and conditions of the agent’s act of knowing. This awareness would help the agent to overcome the deceptions of disengagement that are being generated in different cultures and languages. Taylor provides reasons for transposition. First, the sort of knowledge prompted by the natural sciences promises the power to reorder things.²⁴¹ Secondly, “since the scientific revolution, the natural sciences have been hugely successful in interpreting and changing the world and great prestige attaches to this sort of knowledge” (*PP2*, 130). He postulates that the appeal of epistemology derives from more than just promise of power and instrumental control. Ethical and religious conceptions of the human person are included in the knowledge of the world. Taylor was significantly influenced by the notion of disengaged freedom, and the post-modern relevance and role of ethics and religion in the individual’s knowledge claim.

Taylor describes modern epistemology as a ‘structure’ that operates in a world of multifaceted individuality amongst knowing agents. He attempts to trace the emergence of secularity through this deconstruction of epistemology, placing the knowing agent in the world of language, ethics, and religion.

5.3.4 Epistemology as ‘a Closed World Structure’

Vattimo observes that there has been shift from in ‘the vertical’ or ‘transcendental’ world to ‘the closed’ or ‘horizontal’ world. Taylor also lays out certain world structures

²⁴⁰ Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor: Philosophy Now*, p. 177.

²⁴¹ Ruth Abbey, p. 177.

that are ‘closed’ to transcendence. However, in the enchanted and embodied world, the natural and supernatural are inextricably interwoven. The linkage of the sacred and the natural precludes the division of the ‘supernatural’ from the ‘natural’. Taylor examines some of ‘the closed world structures’ (CWS) seeing in them those features which make it difficult for the modern mind to experience transcendence.²⁴² The notion of CWS is used to explain modern and post-modern experiences’ inability to experience the transcendental.

Taylor presents modern epistemology as ‘a structure’. He offers “an underlying picture which is not only consciously entertained, but controls the way people think, argue, infer, and make sense of things.”²⁴³ In its most significant sense, the CWS of modern epistemology presents a picture of knowing agents as individuals. Such agents build their understanding of the world by combining, relating, and developing new comprehensive theories.²⁴⁴ Knowledge of both ‘self’ and the reality of ‘this world’ as neutral fact take precedence over the knowledge of external reality, attributing value and relevance to forces transcendental to it. The epistemology working as CWS imposes priority relations for what is learned and whom. Taylor contents that,

there are foundational relations. I know the world through my representations. I must grasp the world as fact before I can posit values. I must accede to the transcendent, if at all, by inference from the natural. This can operate as a CWS, because it is obvious that the inference to the transcendent is at the extreme and most fragile and of a series of inferences; it is the most epistemically questionable.²⁴⁵

The ‘transcendent’ can be complied with, by inference from the natural/the secular/this worldly. This inference from the secular/natural is epistemologically questionable. As already discussed, taking cues from Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, Taylor observes that there are four stages in overcoming of epistemology. These are; 1) one’s comprehension of the world does not consist simply in one’s holding inner representations of outer reality. 2) There is an ongoing activity of coping in the world as a bodily, social, and cultural being. This coping provides the background against which one’s representations make sense. This coping activity does not primarily mean

²⁴² Taylor, “What is Secularity” in *Transcending Boundaries in Philosophy and Theology*, eds., Kevin Vanhoozer and Martin Warner, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007, pp. 57-76. Also refer Charles Taylor, “Closed World Structures” in *Religion after Metaphysics*, ed., Mark A. Wrathall, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp.47-68.

²⁴³ This includes foundationalism, representationalism, engaged and embodied agent, and disembodied and disengaged agent, etc.

²⁴⁴ Taylor, “Closed World Structures”, pp. 47-68.

²⁴⁵ Taylor, “Closed World Structures”, pp. 47-68.

that each of us is an individual but rather a social being who takes part in social action. 3) In this coping, the things that are dealt with are not first and foremost objects, but rather things that are the focal points of our dealings, which have relevance, meaning, and significance for one from their first appearance in the world. Here one learns to consider things objectively outside of the relevance of coping. 4) This coping includes features that have a higher status which structures our whole way of life.²⁴⁶

The general thrust of these arguments is to reorder the priority i.e., within epistemology. What were considered ancillary inferences are thus accorded primacy. In Taylor's opinion, even if the fourth stage is excluded, "and consider something like the divine as part of the inescapable context of human action, the whole sense that it comes to as a remote and most fragile inference or addition in a long chain is totally undercut by this overturning of epistemology."²⁴⁷ The driving forces behind this 'overturning' are certain values, virtues, excellences of the independent, disengaged subject, reflexively controlling his own thought processes. This overcoming of epistemology is governed by an ethics of independence, self-control, and self-responsibility, of disengagement, and a refusal to conform to authority, and an aversion to the comforts of the enchanted world. The agent surrenders to the deliverances of the senses rather than to something beyond himself/herself.²⁴⁸ Considering 'the divine as part of the inescapable context of human action' is the result of the overcoming of traditional epistemology. The divine has an unavoidable existential dwelling in the individual self having relevance, meaning and significance. However, seen from epistemological deconstruction, the whole picture of the transcendent was carved into a powerful theory which posited the primacy of the individual self, the neutral, and the intra-mental as the locus of certainty over the divine.

Epistemology seen as a CWS affirms this new way of observing objects within a new historical formation, where human identity as a knowing agent in the disenchanted world is framed as that of a disengaged agent, i.e., that of the disengaged objectifying subject. This involves a re-invention, a recreation of human identity, along with great changes in society and social practices.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ Taylor, "What is Secularity", pp. 57-76.

²⁴⁷ Taylor, pp. 57-76.

²⁴⁸ Taylor, "Closed World Structures", pp. 47-68.

²⁴⁹ Taylor, pp. 47-68.

Taylor provides a hermeneutical deconstruction of traditional epistemology. He tries to free epistemology from the net of instrumental reason and unlocks its autonomy to free the values of ethics and religion. This deconstruction, I suggest, presents the knower/agent as a self-transforming, self-conscious representational being, who is both paradoxically inclined to be disengaged and able to re-contextualise himself/herself. I call this disengaged 'self' the 'secular self'. The disengaged 'self' can separate himself/herself from those earlier understandings which it had previously thought absolute or beyond question. Taylor explains; "[O]ur humanity also consists...in our ability to decentre ourselves from this original engaged mode; to learn to see things in a disengaged fashion, in universal terms."²⁵⁰ Further, the cosmos and the sacred are no longer considered the centre of the self's life as an agent/knower in the world. Since embodiment is fundamental to human subjectivity, the disengaged/secular self relies on its embodied mode for its realisation. The insufficiency and inescapability of the secular is overcome by transposing or ontologising the disengaged. The self-defining nature of the modern secular self through self-localisation becomes an object to itself by becoming detached from the cosmic-moral-absolute that surrounds it. The secular self understands and defines itself in the absence of any attachment to wider and ultimate reality. However, the process of transposition leads to an awareness of the limits and conditions of the secular self's knowing, an awareness that helps overcome the illusions of disengagement. The 'disengaged self' as 'secular' which undergoes transposition/ontologising becomes the source of the distinctive 'secular figure' in Taylor. Thus, Taylor's attempt at *Verwindung* (overcoming) traditional epistemology functions as a tool that traces the source of his notion of secularity. This is clearer when the divine is considered as part of the inescapable context of human action. The whole sense that it becomes a remote and most fragile inference or addition in a long chain is totally challenged by this overturning of epistemology which weakens the transcendent, giving way to the natural and the worldly. Acquiring knowledge in a disengaged and secular manner, through de-centring oneself from the claims of the foundational knowledge, opens the prospect for further de-centering and secularisation. Accordingly, the self's capacity to self-interpret and the notion of the disengaged self is used to further advance the study of 'the secular self' in the next chapter.

²⁵⁰ Charles Taylor, "Merleau-Ponty and the Epistemological Picture" in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, eds., Taylor Carman and Mark B. N. Hansen, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 26-49.

CHAPTER SIX

RE-APPRAISING THE SOURCES OF SECULARITY

6.1 Re-appraisal of the Sources of Secularity

So far, two elements of Taylor's philosophical anthropology have been discussed: (1) the self-interpretable and dialogical nature of the self, and (2) the notion that human beings are essentially embodied agents, with the capacity for disengaged knowledge. In addition, Taylor proposes a third sense of the self with intrinsic moral dimensions which serves to distinguish humans from non-human animals. Nicholas Smith treats the notion of 'the self' as the hinge of Taylor's philosophy of ethics and language.²⁵¹

6.1.1 Sources of 'the Secular Self'

'Self' acquires its selfhood in relation to 'ethics'. One is a 'self' only in relation to other selves, and by possessing the quality of ordinariness. Altruism and ordinariness chart changes in understanding what it is to be a 'self'. Taylor comments:

I believe that what we are as human agents is profoundly interpretation-dependent, that human beings in different cultures can be radically diverse, in keeping with their fundamentally different self-understandings. But I think that a constant is to be found in the shape of the questions that all cultures must address.²⁵²

The human agent has different self-understandings. S/he is an interpretation-dependent hermeneutical being, with a diverse nature and self-understanding of a variety of cultures. However, there are questions all selves should address which indicate a common nature. This means that there are static and changing features of the self, which are different but complimentary. Ruth Abbey calls these the historicist and ontological dimensions of the self: "the ontological dimensions of the self [are] those that do not change. Some of the ontological features of the self...are the centrality of self-interpretation, the fact that humans are animals with language, and the dialogical nature of the selfhood."²⁵³ The historical dimensions of the individual identity or self

²⁵¹ Nicholas Smith, *Charles Taylor: Meaning, Morals and Modernity*, p. 88.

²⁵² Charles Taylor, "The Moral Topography of the Self", In *Hermeneutics and Psychological Theory*, eds., M. Messer, L. Sass and R. Woodfolk, Burnswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988, pp. 298-320.

²⁵³ Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor: Philosophy Now*, p. 56.

are disengaged freedom, (SS, ix), a sense of inwardness (SS, 158), individuality, and uniqueness (SS, ix), expressions of authenticity (SS, 12), the affirmation of ordinary life, and the ethic of benevolence (SS, 12-13). These are linked “with a deeper imputation of dignity and respect to all persons, simply by virtue of them being human.”²⁵⁴ These changing conceptions of the modern self, emerge over the centuries. The historicist dimensions of the self, constitute the genealogical features of the modern self (SS, ix). Secondly, such assumptions help the modern self to have a self-knowledge of its own existence. Thirdly, the historical deconstruction of the self has an emancipatory intent²⁵⁵ (SS, 112). Finally, modernity helps each self to become aware of its own culture and to respect the unique culture of others.

The historical dimensions of the self, its individuality and uniqueness, expressions of authenticity, ordinary life and the ethic of benevolence, are acutely felt in modern culture. Therefore, for Taylor, the historical deconstruction of the self is invaluable to understand its modern form. For Abbey, “one reason for this is his general agreement with Hegel that the present cannot be understood without a knowledge of history; the past is sedimented in the present.”²⁵⁶ As already discussed in Chapter Two, Taylor traced the development of the modern self from its post-Enlightenment form (SS, 495) and historical dimensions of the self against a Christian background. However, the modern marginalisation of religious faith contrast with these notions of freedom, benevolence and affirmation of the ordinary life, with divinity, transcendent goods and the after-life. This led to the marginal negation of all that is cosmic and sacred. Taylor explains this change:

Something important and irreversible did happen in the latter part of the nineteenth century with the rise of unbelief in Anglo-Saxon countries. It was then that they moved from a horizon in which God in some form was virtually unchallengeable to our present predicament in which theism is one options among others (SS, 401).

The irreversibility of this change in religious perception and is associated transitional disenchantment of the self, its affirmation of freedom, benevolence and ordinariness, gradually lead to the growth of the modern ‘secular self’. The ‘secular self’ is unique as understood by Taylor. He does not categorically deny the presence of theism and belief, but presents them as existential options. Taylor’s notion of the self as a moral

²⁵⁴ Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor: Philosophy Now*, p. 80.

²⁵⁵ Abbey observes; “the uncovering the complexity of the modern self and its different strands will free people from the tendency to deny and stifle the plurality of goods that modern selves effectively, if not always knowingly affirm.” P. 73.

²⁵⁶ Ruth Abbey, p. 198.

and ethical agent undergoing an irreversible change in modernity, becomes a source of his conception of secularity. Furthermore, Taylor believes that the modern or the ‘secular self’ evolves a new vision of the good rather than suffering the loss of some older world-view and morality. In what respect does ‘the moral and ethical self’ transform itself into a ‘secular self’?

6.1.2 Enchanted/Porous Self Vs Disenchanted/Buffered Self

Taylor argues that ‘the secular self’ as self-interpretive, disengaged, moral and ethical, progressively evolves. This progressive evolution is experienced both personally and historically. However, one must be cautious about the difference between individual and general history. Personal history has deep-rooted anthropocentric and historical implications. In *Philosophical Arguments*, Taylor describes ‘the self’ as self-interpretive and dialogical, whereas, in *Philosophical Papers*, ‘the self’ is portrayed as disembodied and disengaged. In his later *Sources of the Self*, the self assumes a moral and ethical character. However, in *A Secular Age*, the ‘self’ is described as ‘secular’. This suggests an understanding of ‘the self’ which is constantly evolving. It is also set in society from 1500 to the present time.

The historical unfolding and evolution of ‘the self’ is not merely a tale of obliteration or ‘subtraction’²⁵⁷ but ‘a shift in understanding’ from a condition in which it was ‘virtually impossible not to believe in God’ to one in which belief in God becomes an option amongst others. Taylor proposes three reasons for this. They involve loss of faith in the following: (1) that the natural world which had its place in the cosmos, testified to divine purposes and action,²⁵⁸ (2) that God himself is implicated in the very

²⁵⁷ By “subtraction stories”, Taylor means “all the stories of modernity in general, and secularity in particular, which explains them by human beings having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves from certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge. What emerges from this process – modernity or secularity – is to be understood in terms of underlying features of human nature which were there all along, but had been impeded by what is now set aside. Against this kind of story, I will steadily be arguing that Western modernity, including its secularity, is the fruit of new inventions, newly constructed self-understanding and related practices, and can’t be explained in terms of perennial features of human life.” (SA, 22)

²⁵⁸ Taylor gives an example of this: “the order and design of the universe speaks to its creation, also the great events in the natural order such as storms, droughts, floods, plagues, as well as years of exceptional fertility and flourishing, were seen as acts of God, as the now dead metaphor of our legal language still bears witness.” (SA, 25)

existence of society,²⁵⁹ and (3) that people live in an enchanted world²⁶⁰ (SA, 25). Taylor proposes that ‘enchantment’ and its negation set the crucial conditions whereby pre-modern world evolves into the modern world.

Taylor states that “one of the important differences between us and our ancestors of five hundred years ago is that they lived in an ‘enchanted’ world, and we do not; at the very least, we live in a *much less* ‘enchanted’ world.”²⁶¹ The enchanted world can be described as one in which ‘these forces’ could cross a porous boundary and shape our lives both psychically and physically. ‘These forces’ are the imagined world of spirits, demons, and moral forces in which our ancestors lived (SA, 26). There are two main features of the enchanted world: spirits and magic.²⁶² These imposed themselves strongly on human beings. However, this is not a story of loss but of remaking or reinventing. There is no epistemic or ontic loss involved here but a shaking loose of false beliefs and fear of imagined objects. “The process of disenchantment is the disappearance of this (world of magic)” (SA, 29). The process of disenchantment involves a change in sensibility by means of which one is open to different possibilities.

Disenchantment in Taylor is the translation of Weber’s ‘*Entzauberung*’; “means a process of removing the magic or demystification. (DC, 288). Taylor suggests a more illuminating meaning; “the process of disenchantment, carried out first for religious reasons, consisted of delegitimizing all the practices for dealing with spirits and forces, and magic” (DC, 288). For Weber, ‘disenchantment’ indicates the removal of magic as a technique of salvation. In line with Nietzsche, however, ‘disenchantment’ is understood as the atrophying of ‘the beyond’ (*die Jenseitigkeit*): heaven is empty, God is dead. In the context of science, ‘disenchantment’ is linked first of all to the process

²⁵⁹ Taylor claims that God was encountered everywhere in the universe. “And beyond that, the life of the various associations which made up society, parishes, boroughs, guilds, and so on, were interwoven with ritual and worship...A kingdom could only be conceived as grounded in something higher than mere human action in secular time.” (SA, 25)

²⁶⁰ By “enchanted world”, Taylor means “the world of spirits, demons, and moral forces which our ancestors lived in.” (SA, 25)

²⁶¹ <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2008/09/02/buffered-and-porous-selves/>, accessed on 12/05/2015.

²⁶² Charles Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011, pp. 287-288. Hereafter this text will be cited as DC with corresponding page number. Taylor explains, “There were spirits of the wood, or of the wilderness areas. There were objects with powers to wreak good or ill, such as relics (good) and love potions (not so unambiguously good) ...the causality of certain physical objects were directed to good or ill...So a phial of water from Canterbury (which must contain some blood of the martyr Thomas á Becket) could have a curative effect on any ill you were suffering from.” (DC, 287)

of objectivisation, both in our approach to reality (away from subjective and/or religious attachments) and in the concept of the world itself.²⁶³ When spirit and magic are delegitimised, the only locus of thoughts, feelings, and spiritual élan is ‘mind’. The only ‘minds’ in the cosmos are those of humans. These minds are bounded. For Taylor, “the thoughts, feelings, etc., are situated within the mind. The space ‘within’ is constituted by the possibility of introspective self-awareness” (SA, 30). This means that ‘mind’ has the capacity of ‘introspective self-awareness’, an ‘inwardness’ constituted by ‘radical reflexivity’.²⁶⁴ Taylor refers to this ‘introspective self-awareness of ‘mind’ as ‘*meaning*’ (DC, 288, and SA, 30-33).

I mean..., the perceptions we have as well as the beliefs or propositions which we hold or entertain about the world and ourselves. But I also mean our responses, the significance, importance, meaning, we find in things. I want to use for these the generic term *meaning*, even though there is in principle a danger of confusion with linguistic meaning (DC, 288).

The activity of ‘mind’ is called ‘*meaning*’. Taylor does not want to confuse ‘*meaning*’ with linguistic meaning.²⁶⁵ He uses ‘it’ in the sense of “meaning in life or of a relationship as having great ‘*meaning*’ for us” (DC, 288, and SA, 31). This description of ‘mind’s activity as ‘*meaning*’ helps to explain the difference between ‘the enchanted’ and ‘the disenchanted’ world. This shift in the significance of ‘meaning’ is critical to Taylor’s hermeneutics of secularism and religion. What is distinctive, is sense of ‘meaning’ given to secularity. It is seen as the product of an historical unfolding of the church’s relation to the state. Secularity is not the death of religion, but the basis of establishing a ‘new meaning’ within which an agent lives with a renewed faith embodying that ‘new meaning’. In this, the agent finds the presence of ‘the absolute’ or ‘transcendent’ in the ordinariness of his own mind.

²⁶³ André Cloots, “Marcel Gauchet and The Disenchantment of the World”, in *International Journal in Philosophy and Theology* 67(3), K.U. Leuven: Bijdragen, published online, 26 Apr 2013, pp. 253-287, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.2143/BIJ.67.3.2017726>, accessed on 22/05/2015.

²⁶⁴ Taylor in *Sources of the Self* explains, “Radical Reflexivity brings to the fore a kind of presence to oneself which is inseparable from one’s being the agent of experience, something to which access by its very nature is asymmetrical: there is a crucial difference between the way I experience my activity, thought, and feeling, and the way that you or anyone else does. This is what makes me a being that can speak of itself in the first person...It is the call to concern ourselves with the health of one very important thing as against being completely absorbed in the fate of something much less important.” (SS, 131)

²⁶⁵ *Semantic theory* is a specification of the meanings of the words and sentences of some symbol system. Semantic theories thus answer the question, ‘What is the meaning of this or that expression?’, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/meaning/>, accessed on 23/05/2015.

Taylor argues that in the ‘enchanted’ world *meaning* is outside of the mind, while in the ‘disenchanted’ world *meaning* is ‘in the mind’. In the disenchanted world, things have meaning only when ‘they’ awake a certain response in one’s mind. According to James K. A. Smith, Taylor’s understanding of disenchantment “shifts the location of meaning, moving it from the ‘the world’ into ‘the mind’.”²⁶⁶ As mentioned, people lived in a world of spirits,²⁶⁷ and extra-human agencies. The spirits offered a picture of minds, like humans, in which meanings, in the form of benevolent or malevolent intent resided (SA, 32). In the enchanted world there is then no clear boundary drawn between personal agency and impersonal force. However, Taylor suggests that this boundary line is essential. If a boundary line is not drawn between ‘the porous’ and ‘the buffered’ world, the pre-modern extra-human and cosmic would exercise its power over subjects. Two powers that ‘these’ can exert themselves over the neutral agent are, (1) “the power to impose certain meanings on us” (DC, 290-291), and (2) these “placed meaning within the cosmos” (DC, 291, SA, 34). Objects with supposedly inbuilt powers were known as ‘charged’ objects (SA, 34). Hence, according to Taylor, due to a lack of boundary, “the meaning already exists outside of us, prior to contact; it can take us over, we can fall into its field of force” and meaning is in things, in terms of this power of exogenously inducing or imposing meaning (SA, 34).

Being buffered is an existential orientation of the agent/self’s mind. The buffered self has the possibility of distancing itself from what is outside of it. “What moves the self is no longer a sense of being in tune with nature, our own and the cosmos. It is more like the sense of our own intrinsic worth; something clear and self-referential” (SA, 134). “This new order was coherent, uncompromising, all of a piece. Disenchantment brought a new uniformity of purpose and principle” (SA, 146). It is also capable of disengaging from everything which is outside of the mind. The ultimate purpose of the self is then, what arises within itself. The meaning of things is defined in the self’s responses to it. However, Taylor does not deny the possibility that “these

²⁶⁶ James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014, pp. 28-29.

²⁶⁷ For Taylor, bad ‘spirits’ included Satan, a host of other demons, demons and spirits of the forest, and wilderness, water, storms, etc. Good spirits are not only God, but saints, to whom people pray, and whose shrines people visit for hopes and cures, or in thanks for the healing already prayed for and granted, or for rescue from extreme danger, e.g., at sea (SA, 32).

purposes may be vulnerable to manipulation” by an external agency able to impose different meanings to them (SA, 38).

For the buffered self, being cross-pressured is an opening up. However, the porous self is always cross-pressured by the cause and influence of powers external to it. “[F]or the porous self, the source of its most powerful and important emotions is outside the ‘mind’; or better put, the very notion that there is a clear boundary, allowing us to define an inner base area, grounded in which we can disengage from the rest, has no sense” (SA, 38). The modern bounded self can look upon its boundary as a buffer. This ‘buffer’ helps the self to look at things beyond that do not need to get to it. “The self can see itself as invulnerable, as master of the meanings of things for it” (SA, 38). Taking into consideration these features of ‘invulnerability’ and ‘mastership’ of the self, Taylor sums up two basic contrasts between ‘the porous’ and ‘the buffered’ selves,

- 1) [T]he porous self is vulnerable, to spirits, demons, cosmic forces, and certain fears which can grip it in certain circumstances. The buffered self has been taken out of the world of this kind of fear...
- 2) [T]he buffered self can form the ambition of disengaging from whatever is beyond the boundary. And of giving its own autonomous order to its life. The absence of fear can be not just enjoyed, but seen as an opportunity for self-control or self-direction (SA, 38-39).

In this changed understanding of the self and the world, the inner realm of an event or thing is given priority. An important feature of the ‘buffered self’ is that it makes disengagement possible. Because disengaged, it is free of ‘fear’ and ‘invulnerable’. It is the freedom of the secular-self to be more self-dependent and self-interpreting and escape cross pressuring forces outside ‘itself’.

Many causes can be adduced for disenchantment: Renaissance humanism, the scientific revolution, and the Reformation. To understand their implications, reformation in particular is important to this research. It is an historical occurrence that paved the way for disenchantment and the secularisation of Western Christianity.

6.1.3 The Reformation as a Tool for Disenchantment

In medieval times, there was a profound dissatisfaction with the hierarchical disjuncture between lay life and cloistered vocations. The ‘taken for granted lay life’ was not expected to meet the demands of perfection. According to Taylor, there was a “growing demand to close this gap” of the perfect ‘carrying’ the lay (SA, 62). Religions

organised around the ‘higher’ and the ‘perfect’ fell victim to this dissatisfaction. The emergence of several ‘reformist’ groups attempted to bridge this gap.²⁶⁸

Taylor uses ‘Reform’, with a capital ‘R’ to differentiate from other ‘reform’ movements. For Taylor, ‘Reform’ means a process or a movement that undertakes a radical de-legitimisation of what was previously legitimate. It is a concern or a drive to transform the whole of society to meet ‘higher’ standards. However, here question arises. Are all intellectual and spiritual moments subject to their own forms of deconstruction and reform? Does the pursuit of truth invariably uncover the errors within such pursuits? Is reform really a re-forming, a purifying of an older reform?

According to James K. A. Smith, Taylor uses ‘Reform’ as “a meta-cause, or perhaps better, an umbrella name.”²⁶⁹ Jonathan Sheehan calls ‘Reformation’ ‘the laboratory of the secular’. “It allows us to focus attention on the process by which enchantment meets its demise.”²⁷⁰ This rubric name a range of movements already underway in the late medieval period, and so shouldn’t be reduced to the Protestant Reformation. Michael Warner, Jonathan Vanantwerpen, and Craig Calhoun observe that “secularity in its modern Western sense is significantly a product of the long history of reform movements within Western Christianity.”²⁷¹ This observation stands as an irony at the centre of Taylor’s account of secularity. This desire for ‘Reform’ finds expression in a constellation of internal movements within Christendom, Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Churches, and Renaissance humanism.”²⁷² Taylor uses ‘Reform’ as a signature word signifying a range of movements and initiatives from the late Middle Ages to early modernity. These movements establish the conditions for the secular age.

These movement were dialectical in character and attempted to maintain both the hierarchical equilibrium and initiate religious renewal. The movement implied: (1)

²⁶⁸ Taylor observes that the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages undertook various measures of renewal and reform through a dedicated hierarchy, the clergy and the laity through practice and devotion, by preaching, encouragement and example (SA, 62).

²⁶⁹ Joseph K. A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*, p. 35.

²⁷⁰ Jonathan Sheehan, “When Was Disenchantment? History and the Secular Age” in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, eds., Michael Warner, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010, pp. 219-220.

²⁷¹ Michael Warner, Jonathan Vanantwerpen and Carig Calhoun, “Editor’s Introduction” in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, eds., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010, pp. 1-31.

²⁷² Joseph K. A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*, p. 35.

“The turn to a more inward personal devotion, (2) a greater uneasiness at sacramental and church controlled magic, and (3) the inspiring idea of salvation by faith” (SA, 75-76). These drove various reforms. In the ‘secular’ realm, printing and the emergence of private modes of reading also played a part. The common man felt an existential ‘within’ that improved his life, free from spirits and magic. He formed associations in church and society, and developed new practices of prayer and contemplation’ (SA, 76).

One of the hard issues approached by reformers was that of the sacred. In biblical tradition, God’s ‘sacred’ power is vested and concentrated in certain peoples, times, and places.²⁷³ Vattimo and Taylor believe that ‘the sacred’ is not desecrated by the process of secularisation (*kenosis* and Reformation) but rather that ‘sacredness’ is re-located in a secular context. Through such ‘re-location’ the ‘sacred becomes available not only to the elite but to the ordinary and laity. Taylor argues that a peaceful solution to ‘the sacred’ issue was possible. “Reformation was driven by the spirit of Reform in an...uncompromising mode. One of its principal talking points was the refusal to accept the special vocations and counsels of perfection. There were not to be any more ordinary Christians and super-Christians. The renunciative vocations were abolished. All Christians alike were to be totally dedicated” (SA, 77).

The Reformation was uncompromising. It sought to produce a uniformity of believers. This had two outcomes: (1) it functioned as an engine of disenchantment and displaced the enchanted cosmos, and (2) it attempted to re-order the whole of society. Abolishing the enchanted world created a humanist alternative to faith which Taylor calls ‘Exclusive Humanism’. However, according to Nietzsche’s and Feuerbach’s thinking, when ‘disenchantment’ happens, ‘the ordinary’ itself can become an object of wonder. The consequent loss of enchantment re-gains the wonder of the ordinary. The Reformation abolishes an enchanted world; this led as to disenchantment. Although, ‘the Reform movements’ were the logical tool and the historical pre-condition of the emergence of the world as it is today; it is also an historical continuity involving

²⁷³ Taylor observes that one of the difficult issues that the reformers faced was that of the sacred in the church. “In the term ‘sacred’, I’m pointing to the belief that God’s power is somehow concentrated in certain people times, places or actions. Divine power is in these, in a way it is not in other people, times, etc., which are “profane”. The sacred played a central role in the practices of the mediaeval church. Churches were holy places, made more so by the presence of relics; feasts were holy times, and the sacraments of the church were holy actions, which supposed a clergy with special powers...” (SA, 76)

transformation through negation. However, negation here does not mean destruction but the condition for the emergence of a new orientation.

6.1.4 Exclusive Humanism

The ‘Re-formed’ moral order underpinned the ontological basis for the rise of an ‘ordinary’ conception of the self. For Taylor, ‘exclusive Humanism’ is the self’s state of ordinariness that ‘lopped off’ the sacred. It is ‘exclusive’ because it is “different from most ancient ethics of human nature” (SA, 245). It is entirely human-related because “it’s notion of human flourishing makes no reference to something higher which the human should revere or love or acknowledge” (SA, 245). Hondo Dave, a Taylor scholar, describes ‘exclusive humanism’ as “a way of being in the world that locates the deepest sources of meaning with reference only to human life, rather than with some reference to reality outside of or beyond human life.”²⁷⁴ Since exclusive humanism does not refer to anything ‘outside’ or ‘beyond’, it is profoundly anti-metaphysical.²⁷⁵ James K. A. Smith observes that exclusive humanism provides a new and replacement imaginary that enables us to ‘imagine’ a meaningful life within a self-sufficient universe.²⁷⁶ Ruth Abbey explains exclusive humanism “as a viable alternative to Christianity (at the end of the eighteenth century), one that could give an account of human flourishing, of selfhood, society and politics without reference to God, the divine or transcendent concerns.”²⁷⁷ However, Taylor does not see this as an oppositional phenomenon which overrides religion and belief. It is only ‘a viable alternative’ between varying religious and non-religious possibilities. Taylor describes exclusive humanism as follows:

[It]consists in the combination of two elements— one practical; the other theoretical. The practical element avows the primacy of human life, largely understood in material terms as the valuing of physical life and its necessary corollaries – food, shelter, alleviation of sickness and pain, education, employment, opportunity for a personal life and so forth. The second-order element supplies the additional claim that there is nothing beyond the primacy of human life as outlined in the terms above.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁴ Hondo Dave, “Charles Taylor, Exclusive Humanism, and the Dharma”, in <https://nozeninthwest.wordpress.com/2013/06/16/charles-taylor-exclusive-humanism-and-the-dharma/>, posted on June 16, 2013, accessed on 12/08/2015.

²⁷⁵ This can be read in line with Vattimo’s argument for anti-metaphysics and overcoming metaphysics.

²⁷⁶ James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*, p. 47.

²⁷⁷ Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor: Philosophy Now*, p. 209.

²⁷⁸ Charles Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity: Charles Taylor’s Marianist Award Lecture with Responses*, ed., James L. Heft, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 19.

Exclusive humanism becomes the characteristic face of the disenchanted, modern moral order. It is an epistemic/ontic and existential way of 'being in the world'. The self localises its meaning in this existential 'being-ness' only with reference to itself, not with reference to any powers outside of oneself. Exclusive humanism differs markedly from these ancient theories on two grounds:

- 1) The modern image of human flourishing incorporates an activist, interventionist stance, both towards nature and towards human society...2) The new humanism has taken over universalism from its Christian roots... in that it accepts in principle that the good of everyone must be served in the re-ordering of things (SA, 246).

Unlike other ancient humanist theories, exclusive humanism strives to re-order both nature and the human to serve human purposes in the light of instrumental reason.

In the enchanted world, however the notion that God has purposes for humans was key. The 'secular reformers' faced a recurring question: is it not possible that the same inspiring power of God comes from the contemplation of the order of nature itself? Taylor notes that this 'transferring' or 'shifting' of God's power to both the human and nature 'recurred in exclusive humanisms' (SA, 234). This 'recurrent' of the 'secular reformers' is an interior dialectical transformation which gave exclusive humanism the status of a 'viable spiritual outlook'.

There are two conditions whereby exclusive humanism becomes a viable spiritual reality: one negative and one positive. Taylor suggests, "the negative one, that the enchanted world fades; and, the positive one, that a viable conception of our highest spiritual and moral aspirations arise such that we could conceive of doing without God" (SA, 234). The disenchanted world and the new viable spiritual outlook supposes that every human being is "motivated to act for the good of our fellow human beings" (SA, 246). Taylor calls this humanistic aspiration "community-transcendent beneficence" (SA, 246). It reveals a crucial feature of exclusive humanism. God's transcendent power becomes vested in humans and human beneficence replaces the transcendent power of God. This transition bestows on man a capacity for benevolence and altruism. This enables individuals to flourish and find meaning not beyond but within and around themselves.

How exclusive humanism serve as an ontic tool to understand the present age. Taylor acknowledges "a whole gamut of unbelieving positions" (SA, 259), claiming a three-fold continuity with past humanistic thinking. (1) Exclusive humanism offers an alternative set of moral sources concerning freedom and mutual benefit. (2) It

(exclusive humanism) could not have arisen in any other way. 3) “The wide range of unbelieving positions marked by their origin point in the ethic of the beneficent order” (SA, 259). Therefore, exclusive humanism as an alternative set of moral values promotes the ethics of freedom and mutual benefit. Humans as rational and social beings ‘imagine’ their lives in association with and contributing towards a mutual benefit.

6.1.5 Modern Social Imaginaries

From the beginning of the seventeenth century, the way people ‘imagined’ society was indissociable from a notion of ‘moral order’. Such a vision and ‘the exclusive humanism’ associated with it was the consequence of religious warfare and reform movements. These contributed to the development of ‘the secular self’. ‘New moral order’ was based on John Locke and Hugo Grotius’s theories of ‘Natural Law’.²⁷⁹ Their ‘natural law’ theory was designed as a ‘political entity’ aimed at ‘security’ rather than endorsing the ‘pre-existing moral background’. Taylor observes that the last four centuries the idea of ‘the moral order’ implicit in ‘political obligation’ “have undergone a double expansion both in extension (more people live by it and it has become dominant) and in intensity (the demands it makes are heavier and more ramified)” (SA, 160 and SI, 5). The ‘extension’ and ‘intensity’ of this moral/political order evolve the notions of ‘society and polity, (with the effect of) remaking them’. Hence, ‘extension’ and ‘intensity’ become integral to ‘social imaginary’” (SA, 161 and SI, 6). A social imaginary demands a full realisation and imagining of the ‘here and

²⁷⁹ Taylor uses both these thinkers to explain his theory of the historical social imaginary and its evolution to the present day social imaginary. According to Grotius human beings are supposed to collaborate in peace to their mutual benefit as rational and social agents (he holds a contract theory). He tried to formulate a political society based on the moral and social life of its citizens. Political duties were seen as an extension of one’s moral and social duties. Even political authority derived its binding power from “the moral binding obligations in virtue of the pre-existing principle that promises ought to be kept” (SA, 159). In Locke, a change in emphasis is seen in with respect to priority. The mutual benefits of human beings are actualized in terms of economy and mutual service rather than based on politics bound by moral order. Mutual service is seen in terms of profitable exchange. Taylor argues in conjunction with Locke that; ““Economic” (that is, ordered, peaceful, productive) activity has become the model for human behaviour, and the key for harmonious co-existence” (SA, 167). Taylor was influenced by these thinkers. Transitions in his understanding occurred as an aftermath of these contracts- economic mutual benefit theories.

now'. First of all, for Taylor, there is an "the order to be realised"²⁸⁰ that stands in relation to reality, as one not yet realized, but demanding to be integrally carried out" (SA, 161-162 and SI, 7). 'To be realised' does not mean a prescription but a hermeneutical clue to full realisation. Something 'standing in relation to reality' provides 'an imperative description'. Hence, "an idea of moral or political order can either be ultimate... or for the here and now, and if the latter, can be hermeneutic or prescriptive" (SA, 162 and SI, 7). Ian Fraser suggests that "the hermeneutical implies that the order is actually realised, is part of the normal state of affairs, and offers us a way to understand reality. The prescriptive, on the other hand, demands that the moral order be carried out and realised eventually."²⁸¹ Taylor observes that the modern moral order historically pertains to the 'here and now' and has the potential for further realization.

Taylor develops the modern moral order 'beyond' both "the idea of the Law of a people"²⁸² and "the notion of hierarchy in society."²⁸³ In these, the order tends 'to impose itself by the course of things' which is a common feature in the pre-modern idea of moral order. However, Taylor argues that "a moral order is more than just a set of imposed norms. It also contains what we might call an 'ontic component', an identifying feature of the world that make the norms realizable" (SA, 164 and SI, 10). Introducing the concept of the 'social imaginary', Taylor attempts to classify 'identifying features' of the modern world in the life of each individual. The 'ontic

²⁸⁰ Taylor observes that "the medieval conceptions of political order were often of this kind. In the understandings of the "King's Two Bodies", his individual biological existence realizes and instantiates an undying royal "body"." (SA, 160)

²⁸¹ Ian Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self: Transcending Charles Taylor*, Exeter: Imprint Academia, 2007, p. 114. Taylor summing up these distinctions observes' "we can say that an idea of moral or political order can be ultimate, like the community of saints..." "It migrates a long path, running from the more hermeneutic to the more prescriptive. As used in its original niche by thinkers like Grotius and Pufendorf, it offered an interpretation of what must underlie established governments; grounded in a supposed founding contract, these enjoyed unquestioned legitimacy." (SI, 7)

²⁸² Taylor explains "the Law of the People". It has "governed the people since time out of mind and which, in a sense, defines it as a people. This idea seems to have been wide spread among the Indo-European tribes who at various stages erupted into Europe. It was very powerful in seventeenth century England under the guise of the Ancient Constitution and became one of the key justifying ideas of the rebellion against the King" (SA, 163 and SI, 9). Taylor here refers to J. G. A Pocock's book *The Ancient Constitution and the Federal Press* (2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

²⁸³ Taylor refers to that "hierarchy in society that expresses and corresponds to a hierarchy in the cosmos. These were often theorized in language drawn from the Platonic-Aristotelian concept of Form, but the underlying notion also emerges strongly in theories of correspondence: for example, the king is in his kingdom as the lion among animals, the eagle among birds, and so on...." (SA, 163 and SI, 9-10)

component' in Taylor's sense of the word pertains to 'humans' rather than to God and the cosmos.²⁸⁴

Taylor calls this actuality of the 'new moral order' a 'social imaginary'. Social imaginaries, according to Taylor, contribute to the development of 'the secular self'. They are rooted in society and its practices, but go beyond them. For Taylor, 'social imaginary' means, "the way people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations"²⁸⁵ (SA, 171). Social imaginary is an intra-linguistic or imaginative mode facilitating social existence and mutual beneficence. It enables some collective moral goal individuals can strive for. The social imaginary seeks to explain how imagination, and not simply reason constructs central social institutions and practices.

Taylor illustrates the 'social imaginary' as a process that 'infiltrates and transforms' the modern moral order. It is a 'process' by which "what is originally just an idealisation grows into a complex imaginary through being taken up and associated with social practices and often transformed by the contact"²⁸⁶ (SA, 175). When a theory 'penetrates and transforms' the social imaginary, it is improvised, and inducted into new practices in people's lives.²⁸⁷ A 'new outlook' is articulated that gives rise to fresh practices. The 'new outlook' frames an innovative understanding accessible to all. (SA, 175-176). The process of transforming theory into practice is not one-sided. During the transformation the theory is "glossed" by being given a particular shape by the

²⁸⁴ Taylor explains this with the help of other philosophers like Grotius, Locke and others. Taylor critiques the idea that the modern moral order descendings from Grotius and Locke is self-realizing in the sense invoked by Hesiod or Plato, or the cosmic reactions to Duncan's murder. "It is therefore tempting to think that our modern notions of moral order lack altogether an ontic component. But this would be a mistake...There is an important difference, but it lies in the fact that this component is now a feature about the human, rather than one touching God or the cosmos, and not in the supposed absence altogether of an ontic dimension." (SA, 164 and SI, 10.11)

²⁸⁵ Charles Taylor, "Afterword" in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig Calhoun, eds., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010, pp. 300-324.

²⁸⁶ Taylor uses the examples of America and France in this transition. "The transition was much smoother and less catastrophic in one case, because the idealization of popular sovereignty connected up relatively unproblematically with an existing practice of popular election of assemblies; whereas in the other case, the inability to 'translate' the same principle into a stable and agreed set of practices was an immense source of conflict and uncertainty for more than a century. But in both these great events, there was some awareness of the historical primacy of theory, which is central to the modern idea of 'revolution', whereby we set out to remake our political life according to agreed principles. This 'constructivism' has become a central feature of modern political culture." (SA, 175)

²⁸⁷ Charles Taylor, "Afterword", Pp. 300-324.

practices that nurture it.²⁸⁸ It is an ever-evolving process whereby new practices and meanings emerge to moderate the conditions that produced them.²⁸⁹ Taylor calls this ‘a long march’, an evolutionary process of re-imagining oneself through new ideas, and practices lead to the formation of ‘secular self’.

There are three significant ‘social imaginaries’ which form the structure of the modern moral order: (1) ‘the economy as objective reality’, (2) ‘the public sphere’, and (3) ‘the sovereign people and the democratic rule’ (SA, 176 and SI, 69).

The Economy as an Objectified Reality

‘The economy’ as a social imaginary aids ‘the disenchanted self’ to conduct and imagine in the society independent of any transcendental bindings. It is connected with “the self-understanding of *polite* civilisation as grounded in a commercial society.”²⁹⁰ “Human life is designed to aim at mutual beneficence” (SA, 176) by “an invisible hand as described by Adam Smith.”²⁹¹ The economy functions as ‘an invisible hand’ that benefits the general happiness of society. ‘An invisible hand’ helps individuals to search for the general welfare. In this, purposes weave together, and though different, “they involve in exchange of advantages.”²⁹² The ‘exchange of advantage’ for Taylor

²⁸⁸ Taylor takes cues from Kant’s notion of an abstract category becoming “schematized” when it is applied to reality in space and time, the theory is schematized in the dense sphere of common practice. (Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, “Von dem Schematismus der reinen Vernunftsbegriffe”, Berlin Academy Edition, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, Volume III, 1968, pp. 133-139.

²⁸⁹ Taylor gives the examples of the American and the French revolutions. In both these cases, “the idealisation of popular sovereignty connected up relatively unproblematically with an existing practice of popular election of assemblies, and there was some awareness of the historical primacy of theory, which is central to the modern idea of a “revolution”, whereby we set out to remake our political life according to the agreed principles.” (SA, 175)

²⁹⁰ Taylor notes that “the roots of this understanding go further back, in the Grotian-Lockean idea of order itself...This new notion of order brought about a change in the understanding of the cosmos as the work of God’s Providence. We have here in fact one of the earliest examples of the new model of order moving beyond its original niche and reshaping the image of God’s Providential rule” (SA, 176).

²⁹¹ By Adam Smith’s “Invisible Hands”, Taylor means “the actions and attitudes which we are “programmed” for, which have systematically beneficent results for the general happiness, even though these are not part of what is intended in the action or affirmed in the attitude. Adam Smith in his *Wealth of Nations* has provided us with the most famous of these mechanisms, whereby our search for our own individual prosperity redounds to the general welfare” (SA, 177) and Ian Fraser, p. 126.

²⁹² Taylor observes that the order created by “invisible hand” “is of good engineering design, in which efficient causation plays the crucial role. In this it differs from earlier notions of order, where the harmony comes from the consonance between the Ideas or Forms manifested in the different levels of being or ranks in society. The crucial thing in the new conception is that our purposes mesh, however divergent they may be in the conscious awareness of each of us. They involve us in an exchange of advantages.” (SA, 177)

is “humans engaging in an exchange of services.” The basic mode of the ‘exchange of service’ is ‘economy’.²⁹³ The evolution of economy as a social imaginary is pre-eminently structured towards the implementation of economic security. However, when the economic exchange is understood as a profitable and beneficent, “one could begin to see political society itself through a quasi-economic metaphor” (SA, 177).²⁹⁴ Taylor observes that ‘economy’ could become more than a metaphor; a “dominant end of society.”²⁹⁵

The major shifts effected by ‘economy’ “consists in seeing our society as an ‘economy’, an interlocking set of activities of production, exchange and consumption, which form a system with its own laws and dynamic” (SA, 181 and SI, 76). The economy started to influence human existence, and the way humans linked and interacted without the imposition of hierarchy or authority. The importance and purpose of this social organisation was economic collaboration and exchange. To be more precise, humans were engaged in an exchange of service for the sake of mutual benefit, in which economy plays the major role. When economic dimensions started to play the major role in the modern social order, social security and economic prosperity were the advantageous experiences of the common folk. The economy was a metaphor of profitable exchange. The economy as the first dimension of moral and civil order was later replaced by ‘the public sphere’.

The Public Sphere

Taylor explains ‘the public sphere’ as “a common space in which members of society are deemed to meet through a variety of media: print, electronic, and face-to-face encounters; to discuss matters of common interest; and thus, to be able to form a

²⁹³ Taylor sees this “new economy” as a new understanding of Providence already evident in Locke’s formulation of Natural Law theory in the *Second Treatise*. “We can already see here how much importance the economic dimension is taking on the new notion of the order.” (SA, 177)

²⁹⁴ For “quasi-economic metaphor”, Taylor gives the example of Louis XIV; “Thus no less a personage than Louis XIV, in the advice he offers to his dauphin, subscribes to something like an exchange view. All these different conditions that compose the world are united to each other only by an exchange of reciprocal obligations. The deference and respect that we receive from our subjects are not a free gift from them but payments for the justice and protection they expect to receive from us” (SA, 177-178). (Taylor’s quotes” From *Memories*, p. 63, cited in Nanerl Keohane, *Philosophy and the State in France*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, pp. 249-251).

²⁹⁵ Taylor observes that contemporary with Louis’ memoir of advice, Montchretien offers a theory of the state which sees it partially as the orchestrating power which can make an economy flourish. (“It is he, incidentally, who seems to have coined the term “political economy”) (SA, 178)

common mind about these” (SA, 185 and SI, 83). It is a ‘common space’ because it is an intercommunicating ‘space’ of various media. He suggests that this public sphere a central feature of modernity, constituted in the collective imagination. Taylor’s argument concerning ‘the public sphere’ is influenced by Jürgen Habermas.²⁹⁶ People who have never met, are linked within a common space of discussion through the action of the media.²⁹⁷ Taylor refers to ‘this space’ as ‘the public sphere’ (SA, 186 and SI, 84). Moreover, he observes that all the scattered discussion should be seen by their participants as ‘linked in one great exchange’. It “reflects that a public sphere can only exist if it is imagined as such” (SA, 186 and SI, 85). Developing his argument, Taylor variously refers to ‘common space’,²⁹⁸ ‘topical common space’,²⁹⁹ ‘meta-topical common space’,³⁰⁰ and ‘meta-topicality’. The public sphere transcends both topical spaces and is interwoven into a frame-work comprising all the above-mentioned spaces, thereby providing one large space of ‘non-assembly’ which he calls ‘meta-topical’ (SA, 187 and SI, 86). This meta-topical space is not without common understandings and cannot exist without them. The novelty of ‘meta-topical common space’ is not that it offers a new vision³⁰¹ but rather that it is a step towards a metamorphosis of the social imaginary inspired by the modern idea of order. There are

²⁹⁶ Taylor is influenced by Jürgen Habermas.²⁹⁶ *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. This work studies the genesis of public opinion in eighteenth-century Western Europe and the development of the new concept of public opinion.²⁹⁶ (SA, 186 and SI, 84)

²⁹⁷ By “media”, Taylor means all the means of communications that were available in the eighteenth century, such “as print media, books, pamphlets, newspapers circulated among the educated public, vehiculing theses, analyses, arguments, counter-arguments, referring to refuting each other. These were widely read, and often discussed in face-to-face gatherings, in drawing rooms, coffee houses, salons, and/or in more (authoritatively) “public” places like Parliament.” (SA, 186)

²⁹⁸ “Common space” can be described as a “place” “where people come together in a common act of focus for whatever purpose, be it ritual, the enjoyment of a play, conversation, the celebration of a major event, or whatever. Their focus is common, as against merely convergent, because it is part of what is commonly understood is that they are attending to the common object, or purpose, together, as against each person just happening, on his or her own, to be concerned with the same thing. In this sense, the “opinion of mankind” offers a merely convergent unity, while public opinion is supposedly generated out of a series of common actions.” (SA, 187)

²⁹⁹ A common space is set up when people are assembled for some purposes, “be it on an intimate level of conversation, or on a larger, more ‘public’ scale for a deliberative assembly, or a ritual, or a celebration, or the enjoyment of a football match or an opera, and the like.” These common spaces arising from such assemblies are called by Taylor “topical common space.” (SA, 187)

³⁰⁰ For Taylor, the “public sphere” is different from “common space” and “topical common space”. “It transcends such topical spaces. We might say that it knits together a plurality of such spaces into one larger space of non-assembly. The same public discussion is deemed to pass through our debate today, and someone else’s earnest conversation tomorrow, and the newspaper interview on Thursday, and so on. I want to call this larger kind of non-local common space “meta-topical”. The public sphere which emerges in the eighteenth century is a meta-topical common space.” (SA, 187)

³⁰¹ Taylor observes that the Church and state were already existing “meta-topical-spaces”

two implied features in this step: “its independent identity from the political”³⁰² and “its force as a benchmark of legitimacy”³⁰³ (SA, 187-188 and SI, 87). Taylor clarifies his position by explaining “what is new about it on two levels: what the public sphere *does*; and what it *is*” (SA, 188 and SI, 87). Therefore, I argue that the neutrality of ‘public sphere’ helps to re-imagine individual’s orientation towards religion and state which leads to the formation of secular self.

First, the public sphere “is the locus of a discussion potentially engaging everyone”³⁰⁴ (SA, 188, and SI, 87). The public sphere becomes an ‘extra-political’ and intra-religious power leading to secularity and neutrality. Henceforth, the public sphere enables “the society to come to a common mind, without the mediation of the political sphere, in a discourse of reason outside power, which nevertheless is normative for power” (SA, 190-191 and SI, 91). Second, the public sphere is oriented towards what ‘it’ has to be. Taylor gives two reasons for this. First, it must be an ‘extra-political’ entity, as an association and the common space of discussion, independently existing owing nothing to political structures. It is composed of members of a political society which forms itself outside of the state.³⁰⁵ Taylor observes that Europe is accustomed to living within a dual society, one organised by two mutually irreducible principles. The second aspect of the emergence of the public sphere is called its radical ‘secularity’.

Taylor’s approach to ‘secularity’ emphasises a shift in the understanding of what Western society is based on. The term ‘secular’ is used to signify the nature of the ‘public sphere’ because “it marks in its very etymology what is at stake in this context, i.e., the way human society inhabits time” (SA, 192 and SI, 93). ‘Secular’ in this context has radical connotations contrasting it with both divine and transcendental foundations

³⁰² Taylor explains the independence of the “public sphere” from “political space” with the help of Locke and Grotius. “In the Lockean-Grotian idealization, political society is seen as an instrument for something pre-political: there is a place to stand, mentally, outside the polity, as it were, from which to judge its performance. This is what is reflected in the new ways of imagining social life independent of the political, viz., the economy and the public sphere.” (SA, 188)

³⁰³ According to Taylor freedom is central to the rights society exists to defend. “Contract theories of legitimate government had existed before. But what was new with the theories of this century is that they put the requirement of consent at a more fundamental level.” (SA, 188)

³⁰⁴ Taylor opines that the case of the eighteenth century was different. The “public sphere” involved only the educated, enlightened minority.

³⁰⁵ Taylor gives the example of Stoic and Christian societies. He explains: “For it is obvious that an extra-political, international society is by itself not new. It is preceded by the Stoic cosmopolis, and more immediately, by the Christian Church. Europeans were used to living in a dual society, one organised by two mutually irreducible principles.” (SA, 192)

of society. He discusses an idea of a society being constituted by something which transcends contemporary common action.

Secularity contrasts not only with divinely-established churches, or Great Chains. It is also different from an understanding of our society as constituted by a law which has been ours since time out of mind. Because this too, places our action within a framework, one which binds us together and makes us as a society, and which transcends our common action (SA, 192 and SI, 93-94).

Taylor continues:

The public sphere is an association which is constituted by nothing outside of the common action we carry out in it: coming to a common mind, where possible, through the exchange of ideas. Its existence as an association is just our acting together in this way. This common action is not made possible by a framework which needs to be established in some action-transcendent dimension: either by an act of God, or in a Great Chain, or by a law which comes down to us since time out of mind. This is what makes it radically secular. And this, I want to claim, gets us to the heart of what is new and unprecedented in it (SA, 192 and SI, 94).

He observes that in a purely secular, common agency emanates out of common action. Secularity is ‘modern’ because in contrast to the ‘enchanted’ world, people do not directly relate to divine or transcendent agency. Taylor links his notion of radical secularity to ‘time’ as opposed to ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ time³⁰⁶ (SA, 195 and SI, 98).

He elucidates:

Now the move to what I am calling ‘secularity’ is obviously related to this radically purged time-consciousness. It comes when associations are placed firmly and wholly in homogeneous, profane time, whether or not the higher time is negated altogether, or other associations are still admitted existing in it. Such I want to argue is the case with public sphere, and therein lies its new and unprecedented nature (SA, 196, and SI, 99).

Taylor claims that the ‘public sphere’ is an extra-political, meta-topical, and secular space in which people exchange their ideas and unite in common mind. It constitutes a meta-topical agency independent of both political agency and profane time.

³⁰⁶ Taylor explains his use of “secularity” in relation to “profane” and “sacred” time. He wants the term secularity not to be tied to religion alone. “The exclusion is much broader. For the original sense of ‘secular’ was ‘of the age’, that is, pertaining to profane time. It was close to the sense of ‘temporal’ in the opposition temporal/spiritual, as we saw earlier. Now in earlier ages, the understanding was that this profane time existed in relation to (surrounded by, penetrated by: it is hard to find the right word here) higher times. Pre-modern understandings of time seem to have been always multidimensional. Time was transcended and held in place by eternity; whether that of Greek philosophy, or that of the Biblical God. In either case, eternity was not just endless profane time, but an ascent into the unchanging, or a kind of gathering of time into unity; hence the expression ‘*hoi aiones ton ainon*’ or ‘*secula saeculorum*’. (SA, 194-195)

The Sovereign People

‘The sovereign people’ starts off as an idea, and then penetrates and transmutes itself into social imaginary. It aids in the formation of ‘the secular self’ by different paths. First, it is “a theory inspiring a new kind of activity with new practices, [that] forms the imaginary of whatever groups adopt these practices” (e.g., the Puritan church’s idea of ‘Covenant’ influencing American politics), and the second is “the change in the social imaginary [that] comes with a re-interpretation of a practice which already existed in the old dispensation” (SA, 196-197 and SI, 101).³⁰⁷ Taylor suggests that this change happens through a “transformed social imaginary, in which the idea of foundation is taken out of mythical early time. In other words, it is brought about by collective action in contemporary secular time” (SA, 197 and SI, 101). To this end, He appeals to an ancient constitution that emphasises parliament’s rightful place beside the king. It created a sense of self-rule which became part of a broader society.³⁰⁸ The transition to ‘self-rule’ and ‘new social imaginary’ make people aware that they “share a social imaginary which can fill this requirement of including ways of realizing the new theory” (SA, 200 and SI, 110). The Canadian thinker breaks down ‘this requirement’ into two facets: “(1) the actors have to know what to do, have to have practices in their repertory which put the new order into effect; (2) the ensemble of actors have to agree on what these practices are” (SA, 200 and SI, 115). Taylor uses Kantian ‘schematisation’ as an analogy to argue that theories need to be ‘schematised’ for concrete interpretation.³⁰⁹ He also uses Rousseau’s theory of the ‘general will’ for the formulation of the modern idea of order. “Taylor interprets Rousseau as trying to

³⁰⁷ Taylor explains the idea of Covenant as “a new ecclesial structure that flowed from a theological innovation; and this becomes part of the part of the story of political change, because the civil structures themselves were influenced in certain American colonies by the ways churches were governed, as with Connecticut Congregationalism, where only the ‘converted’ enjoyed full citizenship”. Taylor also observes that “older forms of legitimacy are colonized, as it were, with the new understandings of order, and then transformed; in certain cases, without a clear break.” (SA, 196-197)

³⁰⁸ Taylor explains this with the example of England. The demands for broader popular participation took the form in England of proposals to extend the franchise. “The people wanted in to the established representative structure, as most notably in the Chartist agitation of the 1830’s and 1840’s” (SA, 200).

³⁰⁹ “Taylor argues that in the case of the Russian Revolution in 1917, or example, this schematization was not present because the peasantry could not grasp all the Russian people as a sovereign agent replacing despotic power, so their social imaginary was only local. In the case of the French Revolution, by contrast, Taylor argues that there were different ways to realise popular sovereignty with the unrepresentative Estates General on the one side, and a variety of theories that were influenced by Rousseau on the other.” (Ian Frazer, *Dialectics of the Self*, p. 139)

overcome the motivational dualism between our own self-interest against the interest of others...”³¹⁰

Under this new idea of order, each can pursue their life in such a way that individual pursuits harmonise with one another. This embodies the politics of virtue, the fusion of the individual within the general will. The ideal of the ‘sovereign people’ had a gradual growth through the centuries and the impact of this ideal is crucial to the development of the modern social imaginary. “The new social imaginary comes essentially through a retrospective re-interpretation. The revolutionary process was mobilised largely based on the old, backward-looking legitimacy idea. This will later be the exercise of a power inherent in a sovereign people. The proof of its existence and legitimacy lies in the new polity. But popular sovereignty would have been incapable of doing this job if it had entered the scene too soon” (SI, 112 and SA, 198). The new political, social, environmental scenario created by ‘social imaginaries’ enabled individual selves to imagine their lives as ‘secular selves’. Now let us examine, how does Taylor develop his own unique sense of secularity having a specific teleological and existential purposefulness.

6.2 Development of Secularityiii

6.2.1 The Nova Effect

Having narrated how ‘exclusive humanism’ offers an alternative to faith, and how people ‘imagined’ themselves within a modern moral order, Taylor presents an account of the development of secularityiii. There is a triple-stage development: (1) involving exclusive humanism as an alternative to Christian faith,³¹¹ (2) the nova effect’, and (3) the ‘age of authenticity’. These three stages lead to the present age, and the third specifically “alters the shape of secularityiii” (SA, 299).

How does this change take place? The critiques of institutionalised religion, deism, and humanism, and their cross polemics advance many new positions relating to belief,

³¹⁰ Ian Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self*, p. 139.

³¹¹ Here, I graph the emergence of Exclusive Humanism down the centuries as: **(Enchanted world [porous self] (enthusiasm, superstition and fanaticism) → Disenchanted world [buffered self and buffered world] → Deism → Providential deism → Humanism → Exclusive humanism [atheism])**. I used this graphic imagery in my dissertation for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of M Litt.

and un-belief. They “set in train the dynamic of nova effect, spawning an ever-widening variety of moral/spiritual options...” (SA, 299). As a result, the ‘buffered self’ undergoes further change. This anthropocentric shift allows ‘the self’ to gain a sense of power and capacity to order its both world and itself (SA, 300-301).

This shift is interwoven with “literacy and education, personal self-discipline, development of the productive arts, a sense of decorum, personal self-discipline, government and the respect of law” (SA, 301). With these positive changes, there are also negative ones: “invulnerability lived as a limit...makes us blind or insensitive to whoever lies beyond this ordered human world...” (SA, 302). This sense of ‘missing something’ is part of “a wider sense of malaise”³¹² in the disenchanted world. It is phenomenological in that “the opposition between orthodoxy and unbelief” cross-pressures many looking for a third way. This ‘cross-pressuring’ is part of the dynamic, and this predicament produces the disenchanted world that generates the nova effect. Taylor reads ‘cross-pressure’ from within buffered identity. It is the understanding that ‘the disenchanted’ world lacks ‘meaning’ (SA, 303).³¹³ “This ontic doubt about ‘meaning’ itself is integral to the modern malaise” (SA, 303). This is one source of the nova effect and it compels us to seek new solutions and meanings which will themselves lead to continual, multiple changes over generations.

³¹² Taylor explains ‘the malaise of modernity’ as, “features of our contemporary culture and society that people experience as a loss or a decline, even as our civilization ‘develops’” (Charles Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 1). Taylor brings forth three main malaises of modernity: (1) the loss of meaning, and the fading of moral horizons, (2) the eclipse of ends, in face of rampant instrumental reason, and (3) a loss of freedom. (Charles Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 10.)

³¹³ Taylor observes that our age suffers from loss of meaning. “This malaise is specific to a buffered identity, whose very invulnerability opens it to the danger that not just evil spirits, cosmic forces or gods won’t “get to” it, but that nothing significant will stand out for it.” (SA, 303)

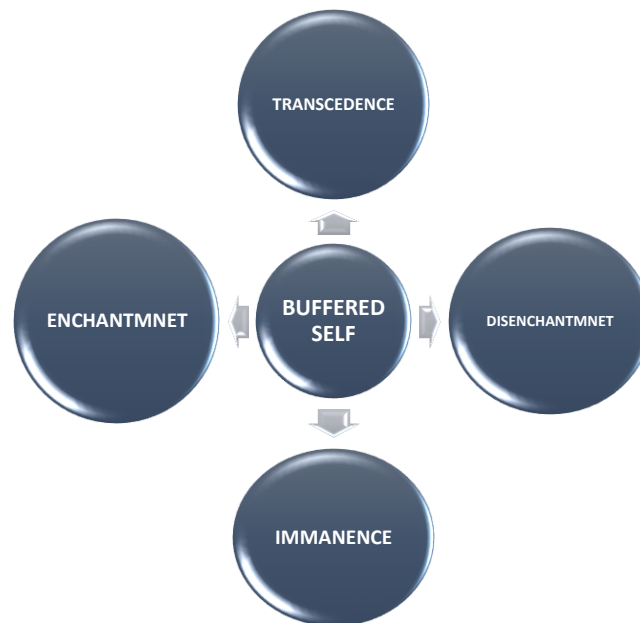


Figure 1 – Nova Effect from Cross-pressure in a Secular Age iii ³¹⁴

The nova effect arises not only out of cross-pressures in the buffered identity but also through “the whole package of buffered identity, with its disengaged subjectivity (SA, 304-305).³¹⁵ The nova effect “is the explosion of believing and unbelieving options that arise out of the felt disappointment with the impersonal order. It is the multiplicity of options that arise out of our discontent.”³¹⁶ This produces not only a viable alternative to Christianity but many other reactions to belief, or unbelief. This primarily happened among the elite and continued throughout the nineteenth century with differently spaced interruptions within various societies.

A given reaction can often give rise to more than one response within the ambivalent of buffered identity. What does this mean? It means that even a call for a return to belief may give rise to new forms of unbelief, and vice versa. This is an ontic-phenomena within the immanent, impersonal, rational order we live in. Taylor identifies three forms which these ‘malaise of immanence’ might take: “1) the sense of the fragility of meaning, the search for an over-reaching significance; 2) the felt flatness of our attempt to solemnise the crucial moments of passage in our lives, and

³¹⁴ This figure is adapted from the figure drawn and presented by James K. A. Smith, P. 63.

³¹⁵ According to Taylor all supporting disciplines of buffered identity sustain an order of freedom and mutual benefit, “(it) has given rise to a gamut of negative reactions, sometimes levelled at the package itself, sometimes against one or other part of it, sometimes against particular solutions which arise from it.” (SA, 305)

³¹⁶ <https://whosoeverdesires.wordpress.com/2011/04/07/taylor-%E2%80%93-a-secular-age-part-3-%E2%80%93-the-nova-effect%E2%80%93/>, accessed on 20/10/2015.

(3) the utter flatness, emptiness of the ordinary” (SA, 309). These are called the “malaise of immanence” because they “come to our horizon with the eclipse of transcendence” (SA, 309). This allows us to state “what some find objectionable or lacking in the buffered, disengaged, disciplined identity in the modern moral order” (SA, 310).³¹⁷ Taylor explains that the “felt dissatisfaction at the immanent order motivates not only new forms of religion, but also different readings of immanence (SA, 310). Taylor calls this ‘the nova’.

By malaise of immanence, Taylor means that there is a shift in emphasis that goes beyond the nova effect. It is in this period, that the alternatives for the creation of secularityⁱⁱⁱ became wider. One of the ‘gamuts of change’ consists in the shift from “cosmos to universe” (SA, 323). Like the social imaginary, the ‘cosmic imaginary’ “makes sense of the ways in which the surrounding world figures in our lives...and the way in which nature figures in our moral and aesthetic imagination” (SA, 323).³¹⁸ It means that there has been “a fundamental change or ‘shift’ in how people ‘imagine’ their environment, and cosmic context.”³¹⁹ This non-Biblical cosmic imaginary “has moved people in a range of directions, from the hardest materialism to Christian orthodoxy; passing by a whole range of intermediate positions” (SA, 351).

Taylor is also interested in another trajectory embedded in the cosmic imaginary, i.e., “the experience of being opened to something deeper and fuller by contact with nature” (SA, 350). It means “some of the ‘nova’ reactions to cross-pressure generate a new sense of the charmed, charged nature of our being-in-the-world.”³²⁰ The outcome, in this modern cosmic imaginary is that “it has opened a space in which people can wander between and around all these positions without having to land clearly and definitely in any one” (SA, 351). How was this ‘free-space’ created? Taylor observes that it was made “possible in large by the shift in the place and understanding of art

³¹⁷ The axes of criticism and objection regarding the ‘malaise of immanence’ according to Taylor can be generally grouped under three categories. They are “axes of resonance, the Romantic axes, and those opposed to Romantic axes which tend to see this modern outlook as too facile and optimistic.” (SA, 311-321)

³¹⁸ “Cosmic imaginary” Taylor explains; “figures in our religious images and practices, including explicit cosmological doctrines; in the stories we tell about other lands and other ages; in our ways of making the seasons and the passage of time; in the place of ‘nature’ in our moral and/or aesthetic sensibility; and in our attempts to develop a ‘scientific’ cosmology,...” (SA, 323)

³¹⁹ James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, p. 79.

³²⁰ James K. A. Smith, p. 73.

that came in the Romantic period” (SA, 352).³²¹ Taylor here emphasises the significant role that ‘art’ plays in creating ‘an open space’ that characterises the secular age.³²²

The ‘open space’ functions as a ‘neutral space’ between the development of a deeper form of materialism and unbelief. It increases cross-pressure experienced of the buffered self between belief and unbelief (SA, 360). How does ‘art’ or this ‘open space’ create the ‘open space of the nova effect’? The arts and the aesthetic become a way of working out “the feeling that there is something inadequate in our way of life, that we live by an order which represses what is really important” (SA, 358). James K. A. Smith observes that this results in an immanent space trying to bridge the lost longing for transcendence. In short ‘art’ creates a ‘place to go for modern unbelief’ without having to settle for the utterly flattened world of mechanism or utilitarianism, but also without having to return to religion proper. So, we get the new sacred space of modernity: the concert hall as temple, the museum as chapel; tourism as the new pilgrimage (SA, 360).³²³ Hence, ‘art’ as ‘Art’ creates room to expand unbelief and this was the way unbelief deepened.

Unbelief increased steadily with complex internal differences in the nineteenth century further expanding and intensifying ‘the nova’. The cross-pressuring belief and unbelief has led to new forms of ideals and counter-ideals within the moral order of society (SA, 419). In the last sixty years, ‘the self’ has entered a new world in which the old links have disappeared. Various un-couplings and de-linkings of belief and unbelief have taken place causing a de-coupling of religion and spirituality (SA, 419). The

³²¹ This understanding of ‘art’ emerges, when ‘art’ as ‘mimesis’ is changed into one that places its emphasises on ‘creation’. It concerns ‘the languages of art’ of painters and poets etc., (SA, 352). Taylor explains it with the example of Shakespeare. “As Shakespeare could draw on the correspondences to make us feel the full horror of the act of regicide, ...He has a servant report the “unnatural” events that have been evoked in sympathy with this terrible deed: the night in which Duncan is murdered is an unruly one, with ‘lamentings heard in the air; strange screams of death’, and it remains dark even though the day should have started. On the previous Tuesday a falcon had been killed by a moussing owl, and Duncan’s horses turned wild in the night, ‘Contending ‘against obedience, as they would/Make war with mankind.’ In a similar way painting could draw on the publicly understood objects of divine and secular history, events and personages which had heightened meaning, as it were, built into them, like the Madonna and Child or the oath of the Horati.” (SA, 352)

³²² “One of the features of post-romantic art, he suggests, is a fundamental shift from art as *mimesis* to art as *poesis*- from art imitating nature to art making its world.” (James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, p. 74.)

³²³ James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, p. 76.

outcome of this change is secularityⁱⁱⁱ. Taylor claims that nova effect with new and widening options of belief and non-belief continues to expand its effects today.

6.2.2 From an Age of Mobilisation to an Age of Authenticity

Taylor observes that nova effect primarily occurs within social elites and the intelligentsia. In proceeding centuries, the predicament of the then upper strata has become that of the whole of society. Taylor in this shift introduces his ‘secularisation theory’ proper. Canadian philosopher elucidates:

This has been mainly concerned with explaining various facets of secularityⁱ (the retreat of religion in public life) and secularityⁱⁱ (decline in belief and practice), but obviously, there is going to be a lot of overlap between secularityⁱⁱⁱ (the change in the conditions of belief). In particular, the relation of this latter with secularityⁱⁱ is bound to be close. This is not because the two changes are identical, or even bound to go together. But the change I am interested in here, (3) involves among the other things the arising of a humanist alternative. This is a precondition for (2) the rise of actual unbelief, which in turn often contributes to (2) the decline of practice (SA, 423).

Here Taylor offers simplified history of the last centuries to portraying the move from an age of elite unbelief to that of contemporary mass secularisation. He uses a Weber-style social and spiritual matrix to explain the shift.

The first of these spiritual and social ideal type is the *ancien régime* (AR). As explained people in AR understand order as that of “a pre-modern kind” (SA, 438).³²⁴ The second ideal type is ‘the Age of Mobilisation’ (AM), which designates a process whereby people were persuaded, dragooned, or bullied into new forms of society, church and association (SA, 445).³²⁵ In AR, there is a wider social and hierarchical context which functions as the framework of all legitimacy. Yet in the AM, there is no background, only a mobilisation or inducement into existence (SA, 445-446).

Historically and phenomenologically, ‘the self’ between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries moved from AR to AM. In contrast to AR, where self is in an enchanted world, ‘the self’ in the AM is induced to the disenchanted world. As a result, all Western societies have “trodden the path out of the AR into the AM, and to the

³²⁴ Taylor observes that “this notion of order holds both for the larger society: we are subordinated to King, Lord, Bishops, nobility, each in their rank; and (or in England, squire and parson) hold sway, and each person has their place. Indeed, we only belong to the larger society through our membership in this local microcosm” (SA, 438).

³²⁵ “Mobilization was already taking place during the English Reformation, or the French Counter-Reformation of the seventeenth century – indeed, the Crusades might be seen as an even earlier example.” (SA, 445)

present predicament of secularityⁱⁱⁱ” (SA, 448). This path out of AR was both extremely demanding and conflictual, particularly for institutional religions.^{326, 327} Taylor dates AM approximately from 1800 to 1950-60. During these centuries, there is an explicit decline of all religious forms throughout many parts of Europe, as well as a gradual development of new religious forms appropriate to the age (SA, 471).³²⁸ These new religious forms fashioned “four strands together: spirituality, discipline, political identity, and an image of civilisational order” (SA, 472). However, these puritanical religious forms were “set for a precipitate fall in the next age” (SA, 472), because antagonistic to outsiders regarding their faith and political codes. The next stage began “to dawn in the mid-twentieth century” (SA, 472).

‘The Age of Authenticity’ (AA), appeared as an alteration of the conditions of belief in the last sixty years. It is an ‘individuating revolution’ which resulting in a “expressive individualism.”³²⁹ Although ‘expressive individualism’ has its origin in the Romantic period, it becomes a mass phenomenon in the 1960’s. James Gerard McEvoy describes, “AA as a new understanding of human identity.”³³⁰ Authenticity is creating an identity for oneself. It is an existential struggle in Heideggerian sense, where ‘the self’ struggles to pick the right identity or to create it.

³²⁶ Taylor says that it was particularly difficult in the case of Catholic societies, where the old model of presence lasted much longer (SA, 448). It caused a re-establishment of religions into two within AM. “The first involved a presence of God at the level of the whole of society, as the author of a Design which this society is undertaking to carry out. The design of God, as it were, defines the political identity of this society. The second consists in ‘free’ churches, set up as instruments of mutual help whereby individuals are brought into contact with the Word of God and mutually strengthen each other in ordering their lives along Godly lines” (SA, 453).

³²⁷ Both these types of religious forms coexist well together. “Not only are they both organised on similar principles: mobilizing to carry out the will of God; but they can also be seen as mutually strengthening. This was the case in the early U.S.A. The Republic secures the freedom of the churches; and the churches sustain the Godly ethos which the Republic requires.” (SA, 453)

³²⁸ Taylor gives the example of the Irish Church which went through a reform process after the famine. People were recruited and mobilised on an impressive scale, surpassing their *ancient régime* counterparts. He also speaks of a “Second Confessional Age” because churches managed to organise so much of their members’ lives, and hence became the focus of often intense loyalty, a sentiment akin to nationalism (SA, 471-472).

³²⁹ The phrase, “individuating revolution”, according to Taylor, “may sound strange, because our modern age was already based on a certain individualism. But this has shifted on to a new axis, without deserting the others. As well as moral/spiritual and instrumental individualisms, we now have a widespread “expressive” individualism.” (SA, 473)

³³⁰ James Gerard McEvoy, “Living in an Age of Authenticity: Charles Taylor on Identity Today” in *Australasian Catholic Record*, 86(2), pp. 161-172. Copyright 2009 Australasian Catholic Record, Archived at Flinders University: [dspace.flinders.edu.au, http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/xmlui/bitstream/handle/2328/26137/McEvoy%20Living.pdf?sequence=1](http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/xmlui/bitstream/handle/2328/26137/McEvoy%20Living.pdf?sequence=1), accessed on 12/10/2015.

Taylor differs from other philosophers in explaining authenticity. He says; “I am using authenticity as the background idea that everyone has of their own particular way of being human that you can either be true or untrue to that.”³³¹ Accordingly, during this period, everyone understood that something had changed, and experienced a sense of loss and a break-up.³³² There are different reasons that can account for this erosion of belief in the 1960’s. They include “affluence, and the continued extension of consumer life styles; social and geographic mobility; outsourcing and downsizing by corporations; new family patterns, particularly the growth of the two-income household with resulting overwork and burnout; suburban spread whereby people often live, work, and shop in three separate areas; the rise of television, digital media, and others” (SA, 473). Notwithstanding, Taylor’s concern was about the moral uneasiness brought about by this new individuation. ‘Moral uneasiness’ means that there occurred a gradual ‘outbreak’ of egoism, or a turn to hedonism. Egoism and mere pleasure-seeking challenged the traditional ethical values of community service and self-discipline and functioned as the motors of change.³³³ There were four significant factors that controlled the individual self prior to ‘the age of authenticity’: (1) an imposition from ‘outside’, (2) an imposition from society, (3) an imposition from previous generations, and, (4) an imposition from religion and politics. However, in AA, each one has his/her own way of realising humanity and each one must find his/her own life against these surrounding and external factors.

³³¹ Charles Taylor and Ron Kuipers, “Religious Belonging in an “Age of Authenticity”: A Conversation with Charles Taylor (Part Two of Three)” in *The Other Journal.com: An Intersection of Theology and Culture*, June 23, 2008, <http://theotherjournal.com/2008/06/23/religious-belonging-in-an-age-of-authenticity-a-conversation-with-charles-taylor-part-two-of-three/>, accessed on 22/10/2015.

³³² Taylor gives the example of Americans who believed that communities are eroding, families, neighbourhoods, even the polity; they sense that people are less willing to participate, to do their bit; and they are less trusting of others (SA, 473). Taylor in *Sources of the Self*, portrays the history of modern self, and identity, tracing the sources of the self from Plato to its contemporary sources and their accompanying moral visions. In *Ethics of Authenticity*, he elaborates his theme of ‘authenticity’ and sorts out the good from the harmful in the modern cultivation of an authentic self. In *A Secular Age*, He seeks to understand the place of religion and ‘the sacred’ in this age of authenticity.

³³³ Taylor observes that (these) ‘motors of change’ may have played a larger role in the motivation of an individual’s life. The most significant feature of this shift is “a large-scale shift in general understanding of ‘the good’ that requires some new understanding of ‘the good’” (SA, 474). In individual cases, this functions as rationalisation or as an animating ideal, and the moral and social ideal itself becomes a crucial facilitating factor. An example of this manifestation of individualism has been the ‘consumer revolution and its by-product of the new consumer culture of ‘the youth market’ (SA, 474). “One important facet of the new consumer culture was the creation of a special youth market, with a flood of new goods, from clothes to records, aimed at an age bracket which ranged over adolescents and youth adults.... Youth even becomes a political reference point, or a basis of mobilization...The present youth culture is defined, both by the way advertising is pitched at it, and to a great degree autonomously, as expressivist....” (SA, 474-475).

AA affects the whole of an individual's life embracing its political, cultural, moral, and religious dimensions. How does AA influence the social imaginaries? Together with three 'social imaginaries', Taylor adds "the space of fashion" (SA, 480) 'the youth culture'. "The space of fashion is one in which we sustain a language consisting of signs and meanings, which is constantly changing, but which at any moment is the background needed to give our gestures the sense they have" (SA, 481). Since, 'fashion' is a language, there is an historical continuity to it. It is a visual language which will have new directions, and permutations. Accordingly, secularism and commitment to religion too is an ontological language. These are socially shared structures which become part of the unfolding continuity of history. The general mode that can be drawn from 'the space of fashion' is that "of horizontal, simultaneous mutual presence, which is not that of a common action, but rather of mutual display" (SA, 481).

Summing up his observations of 'the authentic age', the place of 'the self' and 'the sacred' in contemporary times, Taylor observes that it is an ontological necessity that one directs one's efforts towards human flourishing. The ideal of authenticity is based on the inextricable relation between humans and religious thought. This must include the rigour of the secular imperative of Kant but also transcendental norms.³³⁴ Religion or spirituality, however, do not belong to 'this age' or faith. Taylor observes that the Christian faith can be lived in a better way, and more fully by links with 'other ages' (Eastern: Hinduism, and Buddhism?) rather than being on their own.³³⁵ He argues that it is casting off crutches to move towards a more open, honest, and authentic faith, and not signing on to the dogma of any particular faith. However, Taylor does not deny that there are not only gains but also losses associated with living in an AA. It is something like being in an immanent frame, forever "tossed between."³³⁶ Now let us see how 'the immanent frame' in nova effect functions.

³³⁴ Agnieszka Kaczmarek, "Between the Narrative of Secularization and the Narrative of Authenticity" in *Charles Taylor's Vision of Modernity: Reconstructions and Interpretations*, eds., Christopher Garbowski, Jan Hudzik and Jan Klos, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, pp. 104-117.

³³⁵ Charles Taylor and Ron Kuipers, "Religious Belonging in an Age of Authenticity".

³³⁶ "On the one hand, a trivialization of authenticity is readily available that can make people quite unserious about certain very important issues; and on the other hand, authenticity can introduce the opportunity for discovering better and more profound ways of living and engaging with these issues." (Charles Taylor and Ron Kuipers, "Religious Belonging in an Age of Authenticity").

6.2.3 The Immanent Frame

Through his analysis of the AR, AM, and AA, Taylor tries to address the fundamental issue of his secularisation project: how we got to where we are? He says, “secularisation stories involve some picture of the spiritual shape of the present age” (SA, 539). He moves from an historical and genealogical explanation to a critical analysis of the secularisation story. Taylor reaches the ‘constructive’ part of his project and “makes an attempt to get secularityⁱⁱ to inhabit the secularⁱⁱⁱ age.”³³⁷

The buffered, disciplined self, seeking intimacy comes to see itself as an individual in an age of authenticity. In relation to the instrumentality of individualism, the modern moral order places its emphasis exclusively on secular time. This means that “our sense of being comprehensively in secular time is heavily reinforced by the very thick environment of measured time which we have woven around ourselves in our civilisation” (SA, 541-542). Accordingly, the buffered self of the disciplined individual moves in a constructed social space, where instrumental rationality is a key value, and time is pervasively secular. This thick environment with its total composition is called “the immanent frame” (SA, 542).

‘The immanent frame’ being a metaphorical concept alluding to a ‘frame’ that both boxes in (closes) and boxes out (opens), encloses and focuses, is meant to capture the world we now inhabit in our secular age. “This frame constitutes a ‘natural order’, in contrast to a ‘supernatural’ one (SA, 542).³³⁸ The immanent frame is composed of a ‘constellation’ of impersonal orders, including cosmic, social, and moral. These orders are not saturated if moved by any divine agent. The radical differentiation of the ‘immanent’ from the ‘transcendent’³³⁹ is established in the whole strata of society through a set of connected changes. These changes in practical-self-understanding entail “how we fit into our world (as buffered, disciplined, instrumental agents) and society (as responsible individuals, constituting societies designed for mutual benefit)” (SA, 542).³⁴⁰ This ‘new science’ of the immanent frame opens a theoretical path to the

³³⁷ James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, p. 92.

³³⁸ James K. A. Smith, p. 92.

³³⁹ This distinction between the two was an achievement of Latin Christendom in the middle Ages and early modern period. It “was originally made in order to mark clearly the autonomy of the supernatural. The rebellion of the ‘nominalists’ against Aquinas’ ‘realism’ was meant to establish the sovereign power of God. Whose judgments made right and wrong, and could not be chained by the bent of nature.” (SA, 542).

³⁴⁰ However, the immanent frame owns its historical and existential rootedness to the rise of the major theoretical transformations brought about through the growth of post-Galilean natural science. Post-

immanent order. Therefore, ‘the self’ comes to understand that his/her life is lived within “a self-sufficient immanent order or a constellation of orders, i.e., cosmic, social and moral” (SA, 543). Taylor names the immanent frame as the ontic-epistemic situation of all in the West. Some live it as ‘open’ to beyond and others live it as ‘closed’ (SA, 544). Therefore, “it is an order of natural laws, human laws, and ethical principles, which we all share, while differing in the ultimate meaning, transcendent or not.”³⁴¹

How does the immanent frame remain ‘closed’ or ‘open’? Taylor uses ‘the Neo-Durkheimian’ understanding of civil religion in the U.S.A to explain it. Many in America felt that “there was something ‘beyond’ to aim for, some better and moral way of life, indissolubly connected to God” (SA, 544). However, the lower are not just quantitatively inferior; “there is no way of compensating for the lack of the higher through any accumulation of the lower. On the contrary” (SA, 544). Taylor argues that “whenever the sense of the higher constitutes such distinction, it is somehow ineradicably linked to God, or something ontically higher. Belief in this higher seems obviously right, founded, even undeniable” (SA, 544). The collective good is consubstantial with God or has some relation to transcendence. This is a positive set of ways by which the immanent frame may be lived as open to transcendence.

Conversely, ‘the openness’ of ‘the self’ towards transcendence, is also pushed by certain elements to a ‘closure’ of immanent frame. What are the elements instrumental for this ‘closure’? In response to ‘the goods’ which are consubstantial with the transcendent, there are also notions of ‘the good’ which are seen as immanent (SA, 546).³⁴² It seems Christianity as a strong and influential religion demands allegiance to certain theological beliefs or ecclesiastical structures that face resistance from mainstream society. Religion in this menacing form is what can be called ‘fanaticism’. Taylor finds ‘fanaticism’ as one of the sources of ‘the closure of the immanent

Galilean natural science reminds one of “the familiar picture of the natural, “physical” universe as governed by exceptionalness laws, which may reflect the wisdom and benevolence of the creator, but do not require in order to be understood – or (at least on first level) explained – any reference to a good aimed at, whether in the form of a Platonic Idea, or of Ideas in the mind of God.” (SA, 542)

³⁴¹ Charles Taylor, “Afterward” in *Working with A Secular Age: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Charles Taylor’s Master Narrative*, eds., Florian Zemmin, Colin Jager, Guido Vanheeswijck, Berlin: CPI Books GmbH, Leck, 2016, pp. 369-384.

³⁴² Taylors gives the examples of Gibbon, Voltaire, and Hume. He observes the reaction from (the eighteenth century) which identifies in a strongly transcendent version of Christianity a danger for the goods of the modern moral order (SA, 546).

frame'.³⁴³ It results in the rejection of Christianity, a future turning towards atheism, and other forms of anti-Christian forms of 'isms'.

Taylor also notes a naturalistic rejection of the transcendent that pushes towards 'closure'. It happens through the success of modern natural science, technology, and the development of civilisations that unlock the mysteries of the self. Taylor refers to 'the openness' and 'the closure' of 'the immanent frame' as two polar positions. Taylor observes how a great many people are cross-pressured between these two orientations. These people genuinely wish to respect the scientific shape of the immanent order and have a fear of religious faith, yet who still cannot help believing that there is something more than the merely immanent (SA, 548).³⁴⁴ The emerging outcome of the open and closed positions or how one inhibits the immanent frame, hinges on one's attitude towards transcendence. One can "either (see) the transcendent as a threat, a dangerous temptation, a distraction, or an obstacle to our greatest good, or we can read it as answering our deepest craving, need, fulfilment of the good..." (SA, 458). Whether a threat or a promise, one is free to make crucial turning in life in one direction or the other. This is standing in 'an open space' "where you can feel the wind pulling you, now to belief, now to unbelief" (SA, 549).³⁴⁵

However, Taylor notes that one does not stand 'there' in 'the open space' of belief or non-belief. He explains; "not only is the immanent frame itself not usually or even mainly a set of *beliefs* which we entertain about our predicament, it is the sensed context in which we develop our beliefs; but in the same way, one or other of these takes on the immanent frame, as open or closed, has usually sunk to the level of such an unchallenged framework, something we have trouble often thinking ourselves outside of, even as an imaginative exercise" (SA, 549). One does not, in this frame, have a stable 'position' on transcendence and one does not embrace the frame as a set of belief systems. It is a 'sensed context' in which one can 'take' either 'open' or 'closed' relation with transcendence. It works also as an existential and imaginative exercise in our social imaginary and it becomes part of the background that governs our being-in-the-world.

³⁴³ Taylor here illustrates the example of anti-clericalism. He gives the example of the story of anti-clericalism in nineteenth-century France (SA, 546).

³⁴⁴ Taylor gives the striking example of Victor Hugo and Jean Jaurés for this 'spiritualism' (SA, 548).

³⁴⁵ Taylor has described and elaborated this idea in his lectures on William James. See *-The Varieties of Religion Today*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002, P. 59.

“Taylor’s basic orientations within the immanent frame regarding ‘the sensed context’ and ‘the take’, are not necessarily logical conclusions. His aim is to portray an existential picture of the self in secularityⁱⁱⁱ. How one inhabits the immanent frame is less the fruit of deduction and more a ‘vibe’.”³⁴⁶ He relates ‘the sensed context’ to the Wittgenstein’s “a picture held us captive” (SA, 549).³⁴⁷ It is explained as “a background to our thinking, within whose terms it is carried on, but which is often largely unformulated, and to which we can frequently, just for this reason, imagine no alternative” (SA, 549). Subsequently, how does one occupy the immanent frame? To answer this, Taylor makes a distinction between ‘Jamesian open space’³⁴⁸ and the immanent frame as a ‘spin’ (SA, 549). In Jamesian open space,

we recognise the contestability of our *take* on things, and even feel the pull and tug and cross-pressure of the alternative; or we will fail to recognise that ours is a ‘take’ and instead settle for ‘spin’ – an overconfident ‘picture’ within which we cannot imagine it being otherwise, and thus smugly dismiss those who disagree. If we settle for ‘spin’, we will think it is just ‘obvious’ that the frame is open or closed. (Thus) what I am calling ‘spin’ is a way of avoiding entering this (Jamesian) space, a way of convincing oneself that one’s reading is obvious, compelling, allowing of no cavil or demurral (SA, 551).³⁴⁹

Taylor feels that ‘immanent frame’ is existentially unavoidable, and underpins the power of the mainstream secularisation theory. Taylor stands for both ‘the open’ and ‘closed’ reading of the immanent frame without advocating one or the other. ‘Open’ and ‘closed’ stances are possible only by a ‘leap of faith’ (SA, 550). According to Taylor, what pushes either way is “our overall take on humans and its cosmic and spiritual surroundings” (SA, 550). This ‘take’ is not arbitrary. ‘The take’ can change through further events and experiences. “[O]ur overall sense of things anticipates or leaps ahead of the reasons. It is something in the nature of a hunch; perhaps we might better speak here of ‘anticipatory confidence’. This is what it means to talk of a ‘leap of faith’” (SA, 550).³⁵⁰ One’s thinking is clouded or cramped by a powerful ‘picture’ which prevents seeing the important aspects of reality because one suffers from an

³⁴⁶ James K. A Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, p. 94.

³⁴⁷ Taylor quotes Ludwig Wittgenstein. “*Ein Bild hielt uns gefangen*”, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, 115.

³⁴⁸ “Standing in the Jamesian open space”, Taylor writes, “requires that you have gone further than this second state [of being set free from captivity], and can actually feel some of the force of each position” (SA, 549).

³⁴⁹ James K. A Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, pp. 94-95.

³⁵⁰ Taylor gives an entirely different meaning to the term ‘faith’. “Here it refers to a crucial feature of our over-all sense of things, namely the personal relation of trust and confidence in God, rather than to our motives for taking this stance. It describes the *content* of our position, not the *reasons* for it” (SA, 550).

intellectual dishonesty. To withstand this criticism, ‘the individual self’ occupies a place of neutrality in which each alternative looks equally appealing.

6.2.4 The Conversion and Fullness

Taylor further explains the force of the secularist spin in terms of what he calls the ‘closed world structures’ which appear as ‘a closed immanent order’. CWS makes ‘the take’ of the immanent frame obvious, unchallengeable, and axiomatic (SA, 589). In CWS, faith “remains a possibility, or the self-valorising understanding of the founders of atheism” (SA, 591). However, the change that we have undergone in our modern condition, involves both an alteration of the structures in which we live, and how these are imagined. It cannot be understood in terms of the decline and marginalization of religion alone. All have a share in the immanent frame. “What we share is what I have been calling the immanent frame; the different structures we live in: scientific, social, technological, and so on constitute such a frame in that they are part of a ‘natural’ or ‘this-worldly’ order which can be understood in its own terms, without reference to the ‘supernatural’ or ‘transcendent’” (SA, 594). Due to this radical and continuing relegation of religion and the ‘transcendent’, traditional religious life within Western society became more and more fragmented and unstable.

Taylor notes that the fragmentation and virtual unsustainability of religion is not a fundamental feature of Western society. The unique nature of the modern moral order can be characterised by “a natural fragilization of different religious positions, as well as of the outlooks both of beliefs and unbelief” (SA, 595). The whole culture experiences an ontic and existential cross-pressuring. It is experienced “between narratives of closed immanence on one side, and the sense of their inadequacy on the other, strengthened by encounter with existing milieux of religious practice, or by some intimations of the transcendent” (SA, 595). ‘Cross-pressure’ does not mean “most or everyone in this culture feels torn, but rather that virtually all positions held are drawn to define at last, partly in relation to these extremes” (SA, 677).

Taylor further addresses the condition of belief in the contemporary world by examining unbelieving critiques of religions. He discusses it by pointing out certain historical figures “who broke out of the immanent; people who experienced some kind

of ‘conversion’ (SA, 728). He names Bede Griffiths³⁵¹ and Vaclav Havel³⁵² as examples of people who went through self-authenticating, ‘epiphanic experience’. Most people who have such an experience of ‘conversion’ may not have a self-authenticating epiphanic experience, but “they take on a new view about it from others: saints, prophets, charismatic leaders, who have radiated some sense of more direct contact” (SA, 729). There is a shared religious language which helps to articulate this ‘fullness’.³⁵³ Shared religious language is instrumental in boosting both confidence and the religious experience of ordinary people.³⁵⁴ This language gives force to the conviction that others have lived ‘it’ in a more complete, direct and powerful manner.

Taylor widens his range of examples to what ‘direct contact’ and ‘accepted religious language’ may involve. Analogous to the example of Griffiths and Havel, were the powerful mystical experiences of Francis of Assisi who was seized by a sense of the overpowering force of God’s love. A transformation beyond the human scope and an ‘openness’ to something outside the epiphanic experience is seen in the case of Francis. His was much more than a vision of God ‘out there’, but a heightened power of Love itself, which God opened to him, and is a participation in God’s love (SA, 729). The life of Francis draws one to a ‘middle condition’ where one can have a dim sense of being drawn to and confirmed in this conviction.

One, in our age thinks of this contact in terms of ‘experience’; and to think of experience as something subjective, distinct from the object experienced; and as something to do

³⁵¹ Bede Griffiths was born Alan Richard Griffiths into a British middle-class family at Walton-on-Thames, England in 1906. He read English and Philosophy at Oxford and he became a life-long friend of the writer and scholar C. S. Lewis. Refer to <http://www.overgrownpath.com/2008/07/this-man-is-dangerous.html>, accessed on 12/12/2015.

³⁵² Václav Havel, (born October 5, 1936, Prague, Czechoslovakia [now in Czech Republic]—died December 18, 2011, Hrádek, Czech Republic), Czech playwright, poet, and political dissident, who, after the fall of communism, was president of Czechoslovakia (1989–92) and of the Czech Republic (1993–2003). Refer to <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Vaclav-Havel>, accessed on 12/12/2015.

³⁵³ For Taylor, ‘fullness’ is a subjective experience. “By this he means an experience of life and the world as imbued with meaning, beauty and connection – whatever the source of the experience. Crucially, it is a subjective experience in which the fullness or satisfying intensity is understood to be objective – the way the world is, or at least can sometimes be – not merely a result of subjective attitude...it is a reflection of our individualistic, psychological orientation and also our rationalistic, epistemological criteria for knowledge that we try to grasp fullness entirely in terms of subjective states; we say we have moments of transcendent experience, thus, rather than moments when we experience the transcendent character of reality”. (Michael Warner, Jonathan Vantwerpen, “Editor’s Introduction” in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*. London: Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 11.)

³⁵⁴ Taylor gives certain examples of those who shared the shared language which helps the religious experience of these common folk. “These may be named figures, identified paradigms, like Francis of Assisi, or Saint Teresa; or Jonathan Edwards, or John Wesley; or they may figure as the unnamed company of (to oneself) unknown saints or holy people.” (SA, 729)

with our feelings, distinct from changes in our being: dispositions, orientations, the bent of our lives, etc. That is, 'experience' may have a causal effect on these latter, but it is defined separately from them. This notion of experience, as distinct both from the object and the continuing nature of the subject (experiencer), is quintessentially modern, and springs from the modern philosophy of mind and knowledge... (SA, 729-730).³⁵⁵

The notion of 'experience' as distorting is seen in the case of Griffiths and Havel. Their experience is defined "on the one hand as openness to the deeper reality they were opened to and life changing" (SA, 730) of that reality. Despite this, Taylor notes that there were 'experiences and expressions' of joy, of liberation which were heart-transforming and life-changing in the cases of Francis and Thérèse of Lisieux.³⁵⁶ Thus, 'fullness' involves a contemplative grasp of fullness (Griffiths and Havel) and the vision of the negative absence of fullness: desolation, and emptiness. These experiences consist in life changing moments, being 'surprised by love' (Francis and Thérèse of Lisieux).

Many 'great conversions' or 'great founding movements' involve a transformation of the immanent frame in which people live. It is a way of changing the elements of 'the frame' and moving beyond it (SA, 731).³⁵⁷ This is analogous to a 'paradigm change'³⁵⁸ which displaces the entire existing manner of thought, action, and piety. Contemporary conversions tend to resemble this paradigm change. The totally 'disrupted' insights of 'the converts' "break beyond the limits of the regnant versions of immanent order, either in terms of accepted theories, or of moral and political practice" (SA, 732). It requires that one (the convert) invents 'a new language'³⁵⁹ or literary style. New

³⁵⁵ The influence of Descartes and William James are examples here.

³⁵⁶ Thérèse was born in France in 1873, the pampered daughter of a mother who had wanted to be a saint and a father who had wanted to be monk. She knew as a Carmelite nun she would never be able to perform great deeds. Refer to http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=105, accessed on 12/12/2015.

³⁵⁷ Taylor gives the example of Jesus and Buddha here. "We can think of the change that Jesus wrought in the pre-existing notion of the Messiah in his society, of the way the Buddha transformed the understanding of what it was to go beyond the chain of rebirth; within Christianity, we can cite the way in which Francis transformed the understanding of what it meant to respond to God's love, the new mystical tradition founded by Saint Teresa, and so on." (SA, 731)

³⁵⁸ Taylor has a very unique meaning for his usage of 'paradigm change' in this context. He explains; "[A]ttempting to make a paradigm change beyond this (as against a shift between paradigms within natural science) is in some sense bucking the limits of generally accepted language. The terms in which the paradigm shift can be made are suspect, and difficult to credit; they either belong to outlooks which can be discredited as 'pre-modern' (e.g., God, evil, agape); or else one has to have recourse to a new 'subtler language', whose terms on their own do not have generally accepted referents, but which can point us beyond ordinary, 'immanent' realities. Indeed, what may have to be challenged here is the very distinction nature/super-nature itself." (SA, 732)

³⁵⁹ Taylor refers to 'new language' as, an individual having recourse to a 'new subtler language', whose terms on their own do not have generally accepted referents, but which can point us beyond ordinary

language assists one “to break from the immanent order to a larger, more encompassing one, which includes it while disrupting it” (SA, 732). The disruption of the immanent order by a higher order and an ideal relation (an equilibrium) that is reckoned to be maintained between the two is always a temptation for the converts.³⁶⁰ Taylor proposes ‘three strands’ that maintain the equilibrium between ‘immanent’ and ‘higher’ order. (1) “[T]he deepest sources of European culture were in Christianity, and this culture must lose force and depth in the extent that moderns departed from it” (SA, 733).³⁶¹ (2) This strand identifies the basic error of modernity as subjectivism, that is, “in philosophies which stressed the powers of the free individual subject, constructing his scientific and cultural world” (SA, 733)³⁶², and (3) the idea that Christianity is essential for order itself (SA, 734).³⁶³

Taylor explains the supposed reciprocal link that brings the demands of the secular and the transcendent closer to each other (SA, 735). His observation is that ‘this narrowing of the gap’ is a ‘loss’ relative to a transformation. Taylor takes Ivan Illich³⁶⁴ as an example of the ‘loss’ that an ‘ideal’ transformation suffers. Commenting on Illich, Taylor observes, “something is lost when we take the way of living together that the Gospel points to, and make of it a code of rules enforced by organisations erected for this purpose” (SA, 737). What is lost is the ‘core’ of Christianity. For Illich, there

‘immanent’ realities. The new language challenges the very distinction nature and super nature itself (SA, 732).

³⁶⁰ In this regard, Taylor gives the examples of the followers of Action Française, Christopher Dawson, in Hilaire Belloc, to some degree in G. K. Chesterton, although without the nostalgic dimension, and in T. S. Eliot. (SA, 733)

³⁶¹ Taylor refers to the ideas of Dawson and Eliot to explain the first strand. “I am talking about the common tradition of Christianity which has made Europe what it is, and about the common cultural elements which this common Christianity has brought with it...It is in Christianity that our arts have developed; it is in Christianity that the laws of Europe have – until recently- been rooted. It is against a background of Christianity that all our thought has significance.” (T. S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1962), p. 122; quoted in Joseph Pearce, *Literary Converts* (London: Harper Collins, 1999), P. 264.) Taylor uses this explanation in his footnote 5, Chapter 20, *A Secular Age*. (SA, 846)

³⁶² To substantiate this observation Taylor refers to Eliot who took up this theme. However, Taylor further observes that the best-known articulation of this critique came from the pen of Jacques Martin.

³⁶³ Taylor observes that the modern world, through its subjectivism and its denial of its moral roots, is falling into ever deeper disorder. “Christian religion, or in some cases, Catholicism as the only bulwark against a menacing disintegration and disorder; this theme was woven together with that of the deep roots of European culture, and that of the dangers of self-indulgent subjectivism.” (SA, 734)

³⁶⁴ Illich was born in Vienna into a family with Jewish, Dalmatian and Catholic roots. Refer to <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2002/dec/09/guardianobituaries.highereducation>, accessed on 17/12/2015).

is something monstrous and alienating about the modern moral order. This, he explains, comes from the corruption of the ‘core’, the highest, the *agape*-network.³⁶⁵ This *agape* analogue of Taylor can be compared to Vattimo’s notion of *caritas*, the result of *kenosis*.³⁶⁶ The critique of Illich supports Taylor’s and Vattimo’s notion of how the modern secular world emerges out of the increasingly non-governed reform of the Church.

Further analysing the phenomena of conversion, Taylor discerns two tendencies. Conversions are “often accompanied by an acute sense that (1) the present immanent orders of psychological or moral understanding are deeply flawed, and (2) an intuition of a larger order which can alone make sense of our lives” (SA, 744). The ‘flaw’ of the present order is overcome by establishing another (a real Christendom) and this ‘gap’ (flaw) can also be seen “as endemic in the human historical condition itself” (SA, 744). The ‘endemic gap’ and the tension between the demands of Christian faith and the norms of civilization are not of major concern for converts. Several people who experience conversion move from one view to the other, others learn both ways (SA, 745).³⁶⁷

Different approaches to conversion and re-conversion are defined as ‘the itineraries of faith’. Taylor portrays Charles Péguy³⁶⁸ and Gerard Manely Hopkins³⁶⁹ as examples of those found their own itineraries of faith. “The gamut of new itineraries is much

³⁶⁵ Illich uses the Parable of the Good Samaritan to explain the *agape*-network. Refer to SA, 738-739.

³⁶⁶ Refer to the footnote above for the explanation. (“They are fitted together in a dissymmetric proportionality which comes from God, which is that of *agape*, and which became possible because God became flesh. This enfleshment of God extends outward, through such new links as the Samaritan makes with the Jew, into a network, which we call the Church.” (SA, 738-739))

³⁶⁷ Taylor explains it with examples taken from recent history. “This issue has not been clear in the lives and thought of converts...Some have moved from one view to the other, as with Thomas Merton and Jacques Martin.” (SA, 745)

³⁶⁸ Péguy is a paradigmatic example of a modern who has found his own path. “We can see this first of all in that he comes out of or through a very modern concern, one might say a modern protest at a crucially modern development.” He strongly rejects the “*excarnation*” approach and is deeply influenced by Bergson who offered perhaps the major philosophical challenge to this (*excarnation*) view at that moment in France (SA, 745-746). Some of the themes of Péguy “became central to the reforms of Vatican II, the rehabilitation of freedom, of the church as people of God, the openness to other faiths, amongst others.” (SA, 752)

³⁶⁹ “Hopkins offers, indeed, a striking example of a surprising new itinerary. Like, Péguy, he starts from the modern, more exactly post-Romantic predicament. He felt keenly the threat of a narrowing and reduction of human life in a culture centred on disciplined instrumental reason. We lose contact with the natural world surrounding us, and at the same time, with a higher dimension in our own lives. He was at one in this regard with an important stream of the thought and sensibility of his age; with Ruskin in his sense that the contemporary age has lost a perception of beauty in the world around us; and that this is intimately connected with a system of economic exploitation. But also with Pater in the search to recover an aesthetic dimension in contemporary life.” (SA, 755)

wider” (SA, 765). Taylor gives the examples of Charles de Foucauld, John Marie, Jean Vanier, Mother Teresa, and Thérèse de Lisieux who found new paths of prayer and action (SA, 765). “What is significant about these people is the contribution they made to restoring a previously established, then challenged, church order...” (SA, 765). These ‘conversion experiences’ are paradoxically seen by Taylor as ‘living in a ‘secular age’iii’. The ‘transcendent’ is re-engaged in a renewed fashion within the secular.

To sum up his observations on the prospects for a spiritual-future, Taylor proposes two alternatives. These function as the hinge of secularityiii. These are the conditions of belief in ‘secular age’ and ‘sacred re-thought’ (SA, 768, DC, 214). Commenting on Taylor, James K. A. Smith observes; “(Taylor) finally succumbs to the temptation to make some predictions in light of all his analysis.”³⁷⁰ This leads Taylor to offer alternatives which do not do away with transcendence but re-discover, and recognise secularityiii. His effort makes room for these alternative accounts. He summarises:

I have told a long story, because I believe that one can only get a handle on this if one comes at it historically. It is not that one or other view simply follows from the story, but rather that, in the way I tried to explain..., one’s story only makes sense in the light of a certain understanding of the place of the spiritual in our lives. Reasoning runs in both directions. Once sense of human spiritual life will suggest certain ways of telling our story; but then on the other side, the plausibility or implausibility of the story will give support or cast doubt on one’s view of the spiritual. My claim throughout has been that the view implicit in mainstream theory, its “basement” ...has been rendered less plausible in the light of the actual order of events and processes in Western society that we usually call ‘secularisation’ (SA, 768).

Taylor’s alternative is unapologetic and offer a better account of our spiritual experience. It can only be reached through historical narration. The two views derive from the mainstream secularisation theory. This theory sees religion shrinking further and further though not totally.³⁷¹ “The basic supposition is that transcendent religious views are erroneous, or have no plausible grounds. Once we have outgrown the legacy of the past, they could only re-enter our world through the wilder, more gratuitous inventions of minorities” (SA, 768). The second view is also based on this supposition, and this is contrary to the mainstream views. Taylor explains:

In our religious lives, we are responding to a transcendent reality. We all have some sense of this, which emerges in our identifying and recognizing some mode of what

³⁷⁰ James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, p. 137.

³⁷¹ Taylor explains; “[O]f course, no one expects it to disappear totally, giving way to science, as the old generation of rationalist atheists did. Most atheists accept today that there will always be a certain degree of ‘irrationality’, or at least inattention to science, and wildest ideas will always have defenders.” (SA, 768)

I have called fullness, and seeking to attain it...So the structural characteristic of the religious (re)conversions...that one feels oneself to be breaking out of a narrower frame into a broader field, which makes sense of things in a different way, corresponds to reality. It can easily be that an earlier sense of fullness is now given a new and deeper meaning, as we saw with Bede Griffiths, who first read his school field epiphany in the light of a Wordsworthian Romanticism, and then came to see it in Christian terms (SA, 768-769).

Both views announce that ‘the shutting out’ of the immanent frame is quite understandable. However, ‘the breaking out’ (conversion) into the broader field should make one aware of how little and partial one’s grasp of ‘God’ is. Many ‘believers’³⁷² tend to have the certainty that they have got God right. This certainty itself can be an idolatry. “Too much reality is not only destabilizing, it can be dangerous” (SA, 769), especially if we respond to the perils of transcendence by pre-mature closure.³⁷³ One can also fall prey to idolatry because of self-assurance related to strong ideals.

However, Taylor envisions a future that cannot be defined in any detail. He explains, “things will almost certainly work out differently in different societies. But the general structure would be this: whatever the equilibrium points which dominates in any milieu, it will always be fragile. 1) Some will want to move further ‘inward’, towards a more immanentist position, ... and 2) some will find the equilibrium confining, even stifling, and will want to move outward” (SA, 770). From this ‘inward’ and ‘outward’ movement, Taylor makes two promising predictions: 1) “In societies where the general equilibrium point is firmly within immanence, where many people even have trouble understanding how a sane person could believe in God, the dominant secularisation narrative, which tends to blame our religious past for many of the woes of our world, will become less plausible over time” (SA, 770). 2) “At the same time, this heavy concentration of the atmosphere of immanence will intensify a sense of living in a ‘wasteland’ for subsequent generations, and many young people will begin again to explore beyond the boundaries” (SA, 770). Though these two possibilities run together, religious belief may be something which most humans (in the West and East) have trouble doing without.

Setting aside the general paradigm of the West, Taylor feels that much of our deep past cannot be set aside. It is not just because of our ‘weakness’, but because there is

³⁷² By “believers”, Taylor does not mean an ordinary believer or a spiritual person but a ‘fanatic’.

³⁷³ This happens by drawing “an unambiguous boundary between the pure and the impure through the polarization of conflict, even war.” Both believers and atheists are culprits of this crime.

something genuinely important and valuable in it (SA, 771). According to him, in Christianity repression and marginalisation of the spiritual and excarnation is less and less carried within meaningful bodily forms, but lies more and more 'in the head'. It means that Christianity based on the doctrine of the incarnate God, denies something essential to itself as long as it remains wedded to forms which excarnate. Agreeing with Robert Bellah, Taylor feels that 'nothing' is ever lost (SA, 772).

Conclusion

Taylor's 'story' of secularisation is neither a Christian apologetic nor a confession of his faith. Instead, through a deconstructive and hermeneutical re-reading of the medieval and modern history of Christianity, he draws upon the contemporary consciousness of the spiritual and the secular. The reference to God in a secular age, I argue, is a 'spin' on the 'return of the religion' and 'the re-enchantment of the world' leading to a possible 're-incarnation'. It involves a more integrated approach to religion and the secular. Taylor's intention in narrating both secularityⁱ and secularityⁱⁱ is to endorse his secularityⁱⁱⁱ. He thereby broadens the sense of religion; "I want to focus not only on beliefs and actions 'predicated on the existence of supernatural entities', but also on the perspective of transformation of human beings which takes them beyond...whatever is normally understood as human flourishing..." (SA, 430). He envisages "a more specific, substantive, content-based orientation towards religion. This is key to his lament at the over-reach of Reform, his conviction about modernity's self-misunderstanding, and his claim that it is the ethical attraction of 'debunking', and not the theoretical plausibility or historical adequacy of the modern alternatives, that fuels the immanent frame and mainstream secularisation theory."³⁷⁴ His approach opens multiple paths to God, remaining open towards various forms of religious transcendence.

It is the change in 'the background' that brought diverse and unprecedented choices for human life concerning both of belief and un-belief. If so, it can be argued that 'the great changes' in the medieval religious world have changed the historically and theologically accepted concept of the sacred. He argues, however, that the sacred *in itself* is historically invariant. "To historicise the sacred would be to relativize God as manifestation of the sacred in history...and would subordinate Him to time."³⁷⁵ If so, does Taylor deny an immanent conception of the divine? Is it possible to experience the sacred in the absence of the transcendent God? Or, is there an immanent experience of the sacred: an intuition of wholeness?³⁷⁶ Does not 'the sacred' have the ability to

³⁷⁴ David Storey, "Charles Taylor's Secular Age: Breaking the Spell of the Immanent Frame", pp. 179-218.

³⁷⁵ Peter E. Gorden, "The Place of the Sacred in the Absence of God: Charles Taylor's A Secular Age" in *Journal of History of Ideas*, Vol. 69, No. 4, October 2008, PP 647- 673.

³⁷⁶ Here I refer to the example of Spinoza's divine who is wholly immanent to nature (*Deus sive natura*).

go beyond the constraints of ‘the background’? Answers to these questions are possible when each ‘self’ in contemporaneity accepts how the religious evolves.

Believer or non-believer, one has to understand ‘the religious evolutionary process “as a continuous redrawing of boundaries between the sacred and the profane, transcendence and immanence, and religious and secular.”³⁷⁷ Redrawing dichotomous boundaries entails a refashioning of ‘the self’ who is called to live (or to deny) ‘some norm’ (transcendental norm) beyond human flourishing. Can a mediator or mediating role ‘bridge’ the dichotomy between ‘the transcendental norm’ and ‘human flourishing’? I believe that ‘the church’ can play this role because it partakes in both realities.³⁷⁸ It seems to be the crucial argument of Taylor’s secularityiii. This can be seen as a process of internal secularisation which is an attempt to ‘spiritualise’ the temporal and to bring the religious life out of the monasteries into the *saeculum*, and thus, literally, to secularise the religious. As in Vattimo, the historical process of secularisation is a means to recover the spiritual dimension of religion that institutional religion has covered up. It is a process of interiorising of religion, and thus involves deritualisation, desacralisation, and demagicalisation.³⁷⁹ Accordingly, the principal dialectical aim of the post-secularisation is an attempt to bridge the dichotomous gap between the religious and the secular.

One of the positive outcomes of Taylor’s secularisation is a morphogenesis: a qualitative change in Western religion itself and the way it locates the sacred within personal and social life. From the narrative perspective, his account is both polemical and hermeneutically generous. It tries to understand most positions, and to see virtue in all of them. Despite considering all the possible options, he never gives up his deep personal and practical Christian/Catholic concerns. His critique of faith is challenged in historical epoch and unfolds the meaning of faith. The principle of this historical unfolding of faith is not reducible to any final conclusion but to a continuity of rational deliberations. Thus, his historical and contingent dialectic offers a spiritual teleology. However, the ambivalence of Taylor’s understanding is improved by Vattimo on five areas. They are: (1) the ontological foundation of Taylor’s ‘self’ undergoing the

³⁷⁷ Jose Casanova, “A Secular Age: Dawn or Twilight?”, pp. 265-281.

³⁷⁸ Hermeneutic engagement in philosophical deliberation always involves particular and general. Mediation always involves the movement of the particular in relation to its whole. The Church is one of the components of the pluralistic society. However, in my thesis, the Church is presented as a hermeneutical community which always resides in the tension of immanence and transcendence.

³⁷⁹ Jose Casanova, pp. 265-281.

process of ‘conversion’, (2) secularisation as progress, (3) evolution of the ‘self’ and the *kenotic* God, (4) the disenchanted self and *caritas*, and (5) the divine in the natural.³⁸⁰

I recognise that in the debate of Taylor there are problematic issues. However, I will deal with those issues that directly pertain to the argument of this thesis. The primary criticism I would raise against Taylor is that he has not engaged with other critics regarding secularism. His focus on Latin Christendom is very restricted and dilutes the question of faith into modern ‘expressive individualism’. In so doing, Taylor unnecessarily limits his discussion to a consideration of Western culture alone. Although Taylor has a clear geographical boundary for his case study, there is no clear conceptual boundary drawn for it especially with regard to his study of the evolution of the secular self. Because his account is partly philosophical and yet partly genealogical, historical, sociological and theological, Taylor fails to draw a neat and convincing conceptual boundary for his narrative. Because Taylor’s ‘exclusive humanism’ discards any ontically based understanding of transcendence, it fails to weaken the ‘immanent frame’ as he intends. Taylor’s concepts of ‘the nova effect’, and ‘super nova’ allow individuals to opt for ‘conversion’ and ‘fulness’; and thus, search for transcendence.

Taylor’s discussion of religious belief of the Middle Ages is inadequate. It accounts for trends of non-belief and scepticism also characteristic of that period. He claims that one of the most important ‘shifts’ that occurred is that of the enchanted world being transformed into the disenchanted world. However, Taylor cannot accurately state that the enchanted cosmos is gone entirely for Westerners. I argue that the ‘modern or post-modern self’ may indeed live in an ‘enchanted world’. It can be suggested that ‘enchantment’ continues to appear in new forms such as consumerism, fashion, and sport etc. I suggest that Taylor’s concepts of ‘cross-pressure’ and ‘immanent frame’ are ontically applicable only for the academic elite and intellectuals than for an average believer or non-believer .

³⁸⁰ These aspects of the research are explained in Chapter Seven.

PART- IV

HERMENEUTICAL FUTURE OF RELIGION

“I see today a new religious revival. In this history, the religious revival seems to me the most alive, and perhaps best able to respond to the endemic crisis stemming from our cultural heritage. It is not about a return to causes. Causes, after all, have been deconstructed as much as ‘origins’ and ‘truth’; they no longer speak to us.”³⁸¹ Julia Kristeva

“Religious faith will be of the same significance to the 21st century as political ideology was to the 20th century.” Tony Blair

Introduction

Julia Kristeva and Tony Blair’s statements on the re-engagement of religion concur with significant questions of this research. Are we living in an age of religious revival? Does a new transcendental emerge from the secular? Will the triumph of faith over secularism be a determining feature of the 21st century? Has secularisation helped to re-invent the lost ground of the sacred and religion? Are we witnessing a counter-revolutionary movement against secular nationalism? Has religion returned because it is hard to live without meaning?³⁸² If there is a revival of religion, has this recent visibility been exhibited more in fundamentalist movements and ethno-religious conflicts? Has migration-driven religious diversity stripped secularisation of its foremost status as a virtually uncontested paradigm? Can these developments be called ‘de-secularisation’, or a ‘post-secular’ condition?³⁸³ So far, I tried to answer these questions with the help of the key arguments of Vattimo and Taylor. Drawing cues

³⁸¹ Julia Kristeva, “New Humanism and the Need to Believe”, in *Reimagining the Sacred: Richard Kearney Debates God*, eds., Richard Kearney and Jens Zimmermann, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, pp. 93-127.

³⁸² Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/sundayextra/the-return-of-religion-and-a-search-for-meaning-in-modern-times/7020516>, accessed on 12/08/2016.

³⁸³ Matthias Koenig, “Beyond the Paradigm of Secularisation?”, in *Working with a Secular Age: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Charles Taylor’s Master Narrative*, eds., Florian Zemmin, Colin Jager, and Guido Vanheeswijck, Studies in Religion, Nonreligion, and Secularity, Vol. 3, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016, pp. 23-48.

from them, this research will further explore the inexhaustible continuity, the hermeneutical possibility, and rich implications of the language turn in philosophical and hermeneutical field to answer these questions.

Vattimo and Taylor's thought legitimately respond to the rise of extremism, fundamentalism, and global animosity.³⁸⁴ Each in turn, (as discussed in previous chapters) stand as representative voices of distinct, though profoundly interrelated, modes of thinking about the relation of religion to society and the viability of theological thinking. Through their influential concepts of secularisation, Vattimo and Taylor offer tools for the analysis of "an emergent religious and cultural sensibility that (is) now forced to pick up the broken pieces and to imagine, if not craft, an alternative future" (*ADG*, 8). This emergent religious and cultural sensibility, implies both a post-modern and a post-secular hermeneutical return to religion. Post-secular, and post-modern in this context suggest moving to a condition or perspective after or subsequent to the secular, and to the modern.³⁸⁵ In other words, the secular now emerges as the condition of the new transcendent.

To expand my key argument (the hermeneutical return of religion), I undertake a comparative and dialogical exchange between Vattimo and Taylor. This dialectical critique communicates further aspects of how we in the West have moved from religious skepticism rooted in modernity to re-embrace religion in a post-modern secular world (*ADG*, 13). The philosophical areas where Vattimo and Taylor improve and advance upon each other will be considered. The post-secular attempt to re-engage religion and the sacred will be elucidated by four arguments offering answers to our principal research questions. The arguments point to; 1) the hermeneutical effort to re-engage religion as a non-religious religion, 2) the post-secular recovery of religion that requires the 'self' as its own inevitable being-for-the-other, 3) the hermeneutics of 'weak thought' and *Verwindung* abandoning dogmatic conditions so as to allow charity to take precedence over truth. 4) Secularisation prompts the hermeneutic return of religion as both 'an exodus' and 'transition'.

³⁸⁴ Thomas Guarino, *Vattimo and Theology*, p. 65.

³⁸⁵ Rajeev Bhargava, "We (In India) Have Always Been Post-Secular", pp. 109-136.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HERMENEUTICAL FUTURE OF RELIGION

7.1 A Dialogical Exchange between Vattimo and Taylor

Both Vattimo and Taylor's portrayal of 'post-secularism' opens the opportunity for dialogue about faith and secularism. The post-modern account of secularisation sets the scene for what Nietzsche would have regarded as unthinkable: the return of religion.

A 'dialogical relationship'³⁸⁶ is embedded within the key values of Christianity, notably within the modern tradition that resulted from the Reformation, and these still continue through 'secular philosophical reflection'.³⁸⁷ "This dialectical history is already contained 'in the beginning' of Christianity itself specifically in the identification of the divine with the *logos* as stated in the opening to the Gospel according to John.³⁸⁸ It follows from this "inherently ironic structure that the narrative components - faith and reason, God's death and the return of religion -play themselves out like partners in an ongoing historical conversation."³⁸⁹ Accordingly, a study of the dialogical relationship between Vattimo and Taylor's secularisation suggests a new understanding of the 'post-secular' and the 'return of religion' it enables. To this end, the areas where they agree and complement each other will be explored even as

³⁸⁶ "Post-secular" situation requires an investigation into the way in which the process of secularisation unfolds in a dialectical relationship *with* and not just *against* thinking about faith and religion. *Dialogues* helps to understand how, over the last four centuries, thinkers who used rational arguments to justify faith often undermined it, and how thinkers who saw rationality at its strongest came to recognize the need for faith to address its insufficiencies.

³⁸⁷ John D. Smith, "Dialogue between Faith and Reason: The Death and Return of God in Modern German Thought", in *The Montréal Review*, Cornell University Press, 2011, <http://www.themontrealreview.com/2009/Dialogues-between-faith-and-reason.php>, accessed on 20/02/2016.

³⁸⁸ Gospel according to John states; "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1 in *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Edition).

³⁸⁹ John D. Smith, "Dialogue between Faith and Reason: The Death and Return of God in Modern German Thought".

dialectical contrasts between them are drawn. Secondly, there are certain arguments of Vattimo which Taylor advances but with a new nuance.

7.1.1 Complementarities and Contrasts

Vattimo and Taylor's secularism share an interest in and concern with the continuing relevance of religion and transcendence. Though they belong to different schools of thought³⁹⁰ and use diverse methods in developing their theories, they take seriously the role of Christianity in shaping post-modernity. There are number of areas where they complement and contrast each other which I intend to explore. I use the outcome of these comparisons and contrasts to develop my argument about a 'post-secular return of religion'.

I. The Recursiveness of Lives

Life's recursive structures as conceived by Vattimo comprise of three different but related concerns: politics, philosophy, and religion. They resemble Taylor's account of political fragmentation moulded by political, intellectual and spiritual engagement. The failure of Vattimo's engagement with politics and religion brought about a disillusionment which eventually prompted his return to a radically reconceived religion. It is not a return to a renewed faith in any conventional sense. The 'religious philosopher' in him was shaped by his critical and deconstructive approach to metaphysics. He promotes an approach directed at 'displacing' existing sacred structures with broader secularised versions. As already discussed, by reaffirming his personal faith in Catholicism, Taylor unavoidably 'weakens' his otherwise strong and important claim to participate in the transformation of Christian moral philosophy into a *bona fide* public philosophy with universal ambitions.

II. Limitations of the Secularisation Narrative

Taylor and Vattimo limit the scope of their account of secularisation to Western Europe and North America. Since they focus on Judeo-Christian religion, their

³⁹⁰ Vattimo undoubtedly belongs to the continental school and Taylor is an analytical communitarian.

narrative may be critiqued as incomplete. Taylor admits that his narrative is not ‘clean and simple’. He explains:

this however is not a clean and simple approach either, because a) the religious life of other cultures has impacted on the developments in the West, and also one of the facets of contemporary religious life in the West is the borrowing of forms of devotion, meditation and worship from other parts of the world; and b) there has also been borrowing in the other direction, that is by non-Western societies from the West (hence the fact that certain arrangements of the Indian constitution are captured under the cover name “secularism”).³⁹¹

I suggest that if they had broadened their boundaries to include the East, their work would have a far more comprehensive claim.

III. Does Secularism have a *Telos*?

Vattimo and Taylor’s approach to secularisation raises diverse philosophical, religious, and socio-political questions. Does the process of secularisation end? If so, what is next? Since secularisation is an historical process, there is no limit to secularisation according to Taylor. For Vattimo, as already discussed, the limit to secularisation is *caritas*. Is there an end to *caritas*? If there is an ‘ultimate reality’, will there be a secularisation of reality itself? Is secularism territorial? For Taylor, it is transnational, and its limit is the combined transformation of both state and religion. Where precisely does the secular-religious balance lie in the West which is supposed to represent the *telos* of developmental models of modernisation? One of the crucial outcomes of ‘secularisation’ in the West is the ‘spread’ of new forms of religion, devotion, discipline, congregational life. These ‘new forms’ create a ‘place’ for religion within the fabric of society. Religion becomes more self-consciously pluralistic, developing new visions with an increased capacity for individual affirmation and conversion. This negates dogmatism and in this negation comes a more conscious form of religious consciousness which maintains itself in a permanent interplay of affirmation and negation.

³⁹¹ Charles Taylor, “A Secular Age: Problems around the Secular”, in *The Immanent Frame*, <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2007/11/02/problems-around-the-secular/>, accessed on 12/01/2016.

IV. A Praxis-Oriented Ontology

Taylor and Vattimo go beyond Hegelian idealism to a philosophy of actuality. Vattimo's 'weak ontology' and Taylor's 'secular narrative' are 'ontologies of actuality'. They extend their philosophical borders to politics, ethics, language and culture. Every 'event' in history has connections with closely related questions of politics and religion. It involves a constantly readjusted response to the historical, political, and existential situation of a specific epoch. Accordingly, Vattimo and Taylor 'overcome' the malaise of modernity, and propose a praxis oriented hermeneutics of post-modernity. Their philosophies pertain to the concrete concerns of religious and social life. By introducing variants of a post-secular transformative hermeneutical philosophy, Vattimo and Taylor aim to overcome the remaining traces of both materialism and transcendent notions of God. Their hermeneutical deconstruction culminates in the re-engagement of a post-secular religious outlook. This conscious re-engagement with religion is the outcome of Western secularisation proper. It means that religion has returned not to a specific practice or observance but to a conscious reflexive praxis based on an historical conviction. It takes religion beyond absolutism and secularism *per se*. Religion accompanies the individual rather than acts as an authoritarian master. It involves the displacement of older forms of faith and results in pluralism.

V. An Ontic-Inevitability and Historical Self-interpretability

For Vattimo, secularisation is a participatory process in the fate of being and religious ontology. For Taylor, it is a phenomenon by which the individual self undergoes an historical evolution culminating in the realm of the 'secular self'. For Vattimo, the individual 'self' participates in the process of secularism as an ontic inevitability of being-in-the-world. Taylor, however, observes 'decay' within religion but does not personalise it with his faith. For him, the self-interpretability and the dialogical nature of 'the self' presupposes the narrative nature of human identity and the moral outlook. Man allows existence to be expressed and constituted by 'meanings' of self-interpretability. 'Meaning constitution' and 'self-interpretability' are principal elements in his approach to epistemology, the philosophy of language, and ethics. These in turn become the sources of his secular narrative. Narratives of secularisation

can be constructed in dialogue with the other. By ‘other’, I mean, art, literature, aesthetics, languages; and in the present context – our surrounding ecology.

VI. The Indeterminacy of Secularisation

Vattimo and Taylor’s secularism acknowledges the historicity and the indeterminacy of the concept. “Secularism incessantly blurs together religion and politics, and that its power relies crucially upon the precariousness of the categories it establishes which are expressions of deeper indeterminacies at the very foundation of secularism.”³⁹² Secularism as a feature of modern state is fraught with indeterminacy. The richness of secularism enables it to open to other indeterminate principles and open itself to further historical determination. Secularism is often open to criticism because of its indeterminacy. “For the peculiar intractability of secularism lies not in the normativity of its categories, but in the particular indeterminacies and anxieties it provokes.”³⁹³ I suggest that such indeterminacy offers a “transcendental dimension to secularism” (transcendental because its indeterminacy allows Taylor and Vattimo to adapt a narrative that is unique goes beyond the conventional meaning of the concept) and which at the same time contributes to the formulation of post-secular religion.

VII. The hermeneutic of Overcoming: *Verwindung*

Vattimo and Taylor’s secularism is unambiguously explained as the overcoming (*Verwindung*) of metaphysics and epistemology. It is made possible by deconstructing the traditional understanding of foundationalism and metaphysics. Taylor and Vattimo propose a unique, liberal, tolerant, and democratic hermeneutic. Vattimo draws cues from Nietzschean and Heideggerian nihilism. Vattimo and Taylor aim at not a critical overcoming, but at a convalescence. As explained, through ‘chemical analysis’ (Nietzsche) ‘truth’ itself is dissolved, which amounts to ‘the death or slaying of God’. For Taylor, in overcoming, the individual self disengages itself from the abstract notions of the sacred, and assumes for itself a truer and secularised form of the sacred. He attempts a retrospective analysis of traditional epistemology by ‘ontologising the

³⁹²Hussein Ali Agrama, “Secularism, Sovereignty, Indeterminacy: Is Egypt a Secular or a Religious State?” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 52, Issue 3, July 2010, Pp. 495 - 523.

³⁹³ Mateo Taussig-Rubbo, Robert A Yelle, and Fallers Sullivan Winnifred, *After Secular Law*, eds., Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.

disengaged'. I argue that this presents the knower/agent/self as a self-transforming, self-conscious being, who is paradoxically both inclined to be disengaged and able to re-contextualise himself/herself. I have presented this disengaged 'self' as the 'secular self'.

VIII. Intertwinability of the West and the Judeo-Christian Religion

The crux of Vattimo and Taylor's secularism is the hermeneutic deconstruction of God, truth and faith, that is, the history of the Judeo-Christian religion. For Vattimo, the visions of modernity, capitalist economy, and Western civilisation, are all indirectly structured by their relation to Christianity. The centrality of secularisation has post-metaphysical and nihilistic implications: the dissolution of the sacred, the transition to an ethics of autonomy, to a lay state, to a more flexible literalism in the interpretation of dogmas and precepts, and to a fuller realisation of Christianity, conceived as *kenosis*. Taylor, by the same rationale responds to the profound dissatisfaction with the hierarchical equilibrium between lay life and renunciative vocations. Taylor tries to overcome this dissatisfaction through his narrative of secularism. To this end, he offers an analysis of the self-interpretive, disengaged, moral and ethical self, that undergoes an irreversible process of progressive evolution in an epistemic and ontic sense, leading to the formation of the secular self. This is the result of an historical evolution.

IX. A Deconstructive Hermeneutics

"Since 'to think' has come to mean something different from what it meant before,"³⁹⁴ Vattimo and Taylor have become initiators of a deconstructive hermeneutics after the precedent of Nietzsche and Heidegger. They propose a radical shift to the understanding of hermeneutics. Vattimo envisions a 'hermeneutical circularity' and suggests that hermeneutics is the *Koiné* of post-modernity. 'Hermeneutical circularity' postulates that every interpretation is based on another interpretation and cannot be totally overcome or escaped. Vattimo conceives this mode of interpretation as a process of weakening. As explained in chapter three, 'God is dead', and is not an objective 'claim' but rather an 'announcement'. Hermeneutics as an interpretation 'is

³⁹⁴ Gianni Vattimo, *The Adventure of Difference: Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger*, pp. 1-2.

a matter of individual taste'. Taylor's hermeneutics reduces Being to the 'world as a picture' with the help of Wittgenstein. Taylor and Vattimo use this allegory to show the interpretability or the weakening nature of Being. "Hermeneutical reflection"³⁹⁵ is the key term in Taylor that becomes the source of his socio-political-philosophical arguments. Human existence is expressive of and constituted by 'meanings' shaped by self-interpretations. Taylor's self-interpretable and dialogical self presupposes the narrative nature of 'the self' which in turn becomes the source of his secularity.

X. The Definitive Tools of Secularisation

They are (1) death of God, and (2) the Reformation. (1) For Vattimo, it is the nihilistic conclusion of 'the death of God' and 'the end of metaphysics' that presupposes the end of modernity and the birth of post-modernity. For Taylor, 'the Reform' is the tool of secularisation. Vattimo envisions the process of secularisation as the positive result of Jesus' teaching³⁹⁶, and not a way of moving away from it" (*B*, 41). (2) For Taylor, secularisation is a result of 'the internal reform' of Western Modernity: it envisions a religious reform that goes beyond the epistemic and metaphysical constraints of the 'absolute' and any 'magic' orientation.

XI. Secularisation as 'Return' of Religion

For Vattimo, weak ontology is the dynamic which brings the return of religion. The hermeneutic of 'weak ontology' leads to religious re-engagement. This leads to a hermeneutical emancipation which presents secularisation as the incarnation of the gospel message. Taylor does not talk of a return of religion, but envisions a transformative, purified and secularised version of religion achieved through a process of secularisation.

7.1.2 Taylor Improves on Vattimo

The philosophical substance of this section concerns Taylor improving and advancing five areas of Vattimo's philosophy. These are: 1) secularisation as an event within

³⁹⁵ Nicholas H. Smith, "Taylor and the Hermeneutic Tradition", pp. 29-51.

³⁹⁶ Jesus' teaching on friendship in John 15:15. This is explained in Chapter Three.

Christianity, 2) hermeneutical *Verwindung*, 3) the ‘strength’ of weak ontology, 4) the limitlessness of *kenosis* and *caritas*, and 5) the interminable death of God.

I. Secularisation as an ‘Event’ within Christianity

Vattimo and Taylor characterise Western history as an *event* within Christianity. For Vattimo, it is linked positively to both the Incarnation and to a conception of the history of modernity as a weakening and dissolution of Being. The ‘eventual’ nature of truth and being have the capacity to be constantly interpreted, re-written, remade, and subject to evolution (*EM*, xx). An *event* never really begins or ends within the temporality and an event remains an event as long as it continues to affect history and language. Developing the ‘eventual’ nature of truth and being, Vattimo argues that metaphysical absolutism and its claim to truth is unveiled and undermined by the *kenotic* acts of Jesus which resulted having secularising dynamic. Secularisation is the positive effect of Jesus’ teaching, not a dissolution of it. Rather, for Vattimo, it is an enquiring after and presenting of God as a contemporary reality. It leads to a hypothesis that hermeneutics is a philosophy with clear ontological commitments. Though Taylor’s narrative is analogous to Vattimo’s, he presents a more historical-genealogy. Whereas Vattimo’s concept of secularism is more ontologically grounded. Subsequently, for Vattimo, secularisation is an ontic *event* within or in the unfolding of the history of Christianity, but for Taylor, secularisation is an historical inevitability. If secularisation is the result of both an ontic *event* as well as an historical inevitability within Christianity, it reposes the question of God.

II. The Hermeneutical *Verwindung*

As discussed, Vattimo’s re-evaluation of religion through philosophical deconstruction and hermeneutics utilises ‘Being’ as an *event* as the model for and the kenotic dynamic of Christian thought which dissolves itself finally into *caritas*. This deconstruction is described as a post-modern defence of Christianity secularised goes beyond ‘the death of God’, metaphysics and violence. It realises the nihilistic vocation recognising truth as *event*. It overcomes metaphysical dogmatism and offers a convalescing as *Verwindung*. Taylor’s concept of ‘overcoming epistemology’ I read in relation to Vattimo’s *Verwindung* of metaphysics. Taylor does not use

‘*Verwindung*’ in his writings. However, I use Vattimo’s *Verwindung* as a concept to elucidate Taylor’s theme of ‘overcoming epistemology’ which is so decisive in tracing the epiphany of secularism. In both cases, overcoming metaphysics and epistemology can be set in opposition to *Überwindung* or total ‘overcoming’. By using *Verwindung* instead of *Überwindung*, Vattimo states that his ‘weak thought’ performs a *Verwindung* at the close of metaphysics. Taylor is not intent on claiming a total and radical overcoming of epistemology but rather a hermeneutical deconstruction of absolute truth claims. This frees epistemology from instrumental reasoning and presents the knowledge-agent as a self-transforming conscious being.

In addition, Vattimo sees *Verwindung* as a key form of post-metaphysical thought. It is not only a matter for thought, rather, it concerns ‘thoughtful being’ as such. The destiny of ‘Being’ is actualised with the help of *Verwindung*, and Vattimo argues that the hermeneutical being of ‘Being’ (that underwent the process of *Verwindung*) is not to be ignored but experienced in every human situation. As seen in chapter three, Vattimo translates *Verwindung* into a familiar term: secularisation. Secularisation describes the course of history not as an uncurving progression or as decadence, but as a course of *events* by which emancipation is reached only by means of a radical transformation of its very contents (*EM*, 179). If *Verwindung*/secularisation concerns ‘Being’ and is a course of transformative *events*, Taylor’s concept of the ‘modern social order’ and ‘social imaginary’ draw cues from ‘Being’s ‘transformative and eventing character’. Taylor’s concept of ‘social imaginary’ can be grasped as the existential element of Vattimo’s experiencing of *Verwindung*. Taylor’s ‘modern social order’ has the character of the ‘here and now’ and the potential for further realisation. For him the ‘social imaginary’ is a ‘process’ by which the individual self undergoes a transformative and penetrating change. Taylor’s ‘individual self’s’ ‘identifying features’ are rooted in society and social practices but can imagine and re-imagine beyond society. The ‘eventual’ nature of social imaginary leads the individual self into new dimensions of social life. Taylor gives the example of ‘fashion’ as a form of social imaginary. The self gives way to an ever-evolving process whereby new practices and meanings emerge enabling the self to adapt to new horizons of social practices in relation to consumerism and instant gratification etc.

III. The ‘Strength’ of Weak Ontology

For Vattimo, ‘weak ontology’ functions as an aid or rather a medium through which the return of religion is brought about. He frames it as a returning home. His exploration of ‘weak thought’ allows him to re-establish continuity with his religious origins but differently. It is not a return to the faith of his childhood but a return to a renewed understanding of Christianity. It becomes an existential possibility for him and, thus, he discovered a significant link between the history of Christian revelation and the history of nihilism. Vattimo re-interprets the history of the West in terms of the Christian message. By way of contrast, Taylor’s narrative of secularisation is also influenced by his intellectual, political and spiritual biography but he does not talk about isolating himself from or ‘returning’ to religious faith. His secularism does not have a personally disturbing effect on his faith. His secularism is a narrative. He calls it ‘a master narrative’. Vattimo’s secularism is existentially oriented and traces its origin to the very source of the Christian message. It finds its culmination in kenotic *caritas*. Taylor by contrast gives examples of individuals who underwent personal ‘conversions’. He portrays a historically inevitable evolution of the West from the 1500’s. The principal ‘strand’ of this evolution consists of the ‘conditions of belief’ in Christianity in the West. He presents the genealogy of secularism as an historically inevitable evolution, one which leads to the realisation of a truer form of religion opening to the possibility of continuous conversion.

IV. The Limitlessness of *Kenosis* and *Caritas*

As discussed, Vattimo’s *kenosis* has the structure of a *Verwindung* leading to secularisation³⁹⁷ (B, 39). Distinguished from nihilism, it does not imply a total “conversion to Christianity, but rather it is an interpretation” (B, 9). The hermeneutic of *kenosis* adheres to charity (*caritas*) and does not make any claim to final truth. In this kenotic Christianity, the source and paradigm of secularisation is actualised, and is itself open further realisation in *caritas*. Thus, as already discussed in chapter four, secularisation has only one limit and that is *caritas* or charity (B, 62-65, AC, 48, and

³⁹⁷ Vattimo explains, “God’s abasement to the level of humanity, what the New Testament calls God’s *kenosis*, will be interpreted as the sign that the non-violent and non-absolute God of the post-metaphysical epoch has as its distinctive trait the very vocation for weakening of which Heideggerian philosophy speaks.” (B,39)

ADG, 39). This is more than an end, an ideal goal, or limit, but opens limitless vistas without *limit*. If secularisation has no limit, the possibility for return of religion is more significant. It means ‘the return’ is conceivable through preference for *caritas* rather than for justice, truth, severity, and the majesty of God. It is sufficiently clear that the New Testament orients one to recognise this (love) as the sole, supreme principle (B, 64). The hermeneutical consequence of *truth* is that it is increasingly determined by agreement with others³⁹⁸ (ADG, 43). This paves the way for the dissolution of the objectivity of truth through *kenosis*. The dissolution of the objectivity of truth has the potential of *caritas*/charity to replace truth. The experience of truth is of an interpretive kind in dialogical charity. The experience of truth is possible only within the alterity of *caritas*.

I use *caritas* to elucidate the constructive possibilities within the ‘openness’ of ‘the immanent frame’ of Charles Taylor. This ‘frame’ constitutes the natural order rather than a transcendental order. It is composed of cosmic, social, and moral orders through a set of connected changes in ‘the self’s’ practical self-understanding. This fits each individual into the world as a buffered, disciplined, and instrumental agent. ‘The self’ realises that its life is lived within this cosmic, social, and moral order. This ontic-epistemic status can be either lived as ‘open’ or ‘closed’. The nihilistic hermeneutic of *caritas* can function as a tool for the ‘open’ take of the immanent frame. The possibility to aim ‘beyond’ is ineradicably linked to God who is the incarnate, the *caritas*. The alterity and the dialogical nature of *caritas* will prompt ‘the self’ to go beyond the constraints of the ‘closed’ spin of ‘the immanent frame’. Nicholas Davey comments that “...involvement in *kenotic* process is demanding, for there is no end to negotiating with and opening to the other.”³⁹⁹ Though ‘demanding’, the inherent alterity of the never-ending negotiation of and the openness to the other, enables *caritas* to surpass ‘cross pressuring’. Thus, nihilistic interpretability enables *caritas* to take precedence over the cosmic, social and ethical world.

³⁹⁸ Vattimo explains, “we do not, and perhaps cannot, agree when we have found the truth, but we may say that at least we have found some truth when we have agreed upon something.” (ADG, 43)

³⁹⁹ Nicholas Davey, “Gianni Vattimo” in *The Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics*, eds., Niall Keane and Chris Lawn, West Sussex: John Wiley and Sons, Ltd, 2016, pp. 429-434.

V. The Interminability of Nietzschean Death of God

Vattimo states that “it is precisely because the God of Greek philosophy is dead that it is possible to listen to the Bible again” (ADG, 97). Nihilistically, Vattimo and Taylor’s hermeneutic secularisation works as an impetus to abandon atheism. Vattimo uses hermeneutics as the ‘*koiné*’ of Western thought and adheres to hermeneutical circularity to explain the post-secular approach to religion. He envisions a hermeneutical weakening in which the weight and eternity of objective structures are weakened. Vattimo grasps that after the death of God hermeneutical engagement leads to religious re-conversion and return. Taylor is also not concerned about the method of hermeneutics. His central focus is on meaning, expression, and sense in relation to man as a self-interpreting animal. Questions of meaning, expression, and sense in interpretation are not an epistemological issue but in the present age an ontological one.⁴⁰⁰ They refer to the purpose a self gives to itself and provide a *telos* that guides its actions. The teleological purposefulness of human existence is achieved through a dialogical relationship with ‘the other’ which presupposes an ethical and moral outlook. This self-interpretability and dialogical relationship strengthens the secularism of Taylor. Bearing in mind their hermeneutical uniqueness, I argue that Vattimo’s Nietzschean ‘death of God’ would turn the attention of Taylor’s disengaged ‘self’ more ‘inward’. I mean ‘inward’ because for ‘the buffered self’ which is being cross-pressured by transcendence and immanence, ‘the event of Christ’s death’ or ‘Christianity’ will become a subjective experience through which it can propose meaning and purpose for itself. If so, the nihilistic hermeneutic of ‘the death of God’ having the character of an announcement (an event) (AC, 13), can potentially transform the existence and self-understanding of ‘the self’ who receives that announcement (AC, 13). Given the self-interpretability, purposefulness, and dialogical nature, ‘self’ is able to ‘go beyond’ this cross-pressuring to a personal transformation and ‘conversion’, i.e., “a move outward” (SA, 770). This leads to a transformed faith in Christianity where the ‘metaphysical God is dead’ and Kenotic Christ lives in the form of *caritas* which is secularisation’s defining message. Therefore, “secularisation is not opposed to religious experience but to realisation of its kenotic principle.”⁴⁰¹ I suggest that the

⁴⁰⁰ “Questions of meaning, expression, and sense in interpretation are not an epistemological issue but in the present context an ontological one.” An explanation to this argument by Taylor is elaborately dealt with in p. 53.

⁴⁰¹ Nicholas Davey, “Gianni Vattimo”, pp. 429-434.

possibility of Taylor's 'self' 'goes beyond' 'cross-pressuring would help Vattimo to defend Nietzsche against all sorts of criticism labelling him as 'the murderer of God.' Nietzsche's announcement of 'the death of God' can be seen as continuation and development of the sacrificing death of Christ and 'the death of God'. These events are historically transformative and in the case of religion lead to the secularisation of religion which can be classified as a purification of its metaphysical dogma. It is notable that this Nietzschean announcement is being repeated in history and cultures wherever there is an absolute claim for truth. Taylor observes that the claim too much reality is not only destabilising but can be dangerous and promote negative reactions (SA, 769). This is evident in fanatical claims for the supremacy of the transcendental absolute of a particular religion, e.g., Christian absolutism across Europe and America from 1500 to 1900, ISIS, and Islamic fundamentalist groups, particularly in the Middle East, as well as an over-emphasis on nationalist chauvinism (Nazism, fascism, and all modern forms of dictatorship). This announcement can also be a reminder to humanity that 'absolutism' of any sort leads to 'the death of God'.

The contemporary relevance of these arguments depends entirely on how significantly they are critiqued by contemporary philosophical deliberations and their relevance of post-secularity.

7.1.3 Vattimo Improves on Taylor

The philosophical substance of this section concerns Vattimo improving upon and developing five areas of Taylor's philosophy. These are, (1) the ontological foundation of Taylor's 'self' undergoing the process of 'conversion', (2) secularisation as progress, (3) evolution of the self and the *kenotic* God, (4) the disenchanted self and *caritas*, and (5) the divine in the natural.

I. An Ontological Foundation for 'Conversion'

According to Taylor the distinctive nature of the modern moral order can be characterised by a natural fragilisation of different religious positions, in which the self is led through both belief and unbelief (SA, 595). Taylor observes that in modern moral order, 'the individual self' is 'cross-pressured' in the 'immanent frame'. According to him, it is possible to 'break out of the immanent frame' and experience

‘conversion’ and ‘fullness’. This experience of conversion can be either a kind of self-authenticating epiphanic experience, or of being seized by a sense of the overpowering force of God’s love. Taylor describes this as a transformation beyond human scope and an ‘openness’ to something outside oneself. It is more than a vision of God ‘out there’, but an experience of a heightened power of ‘love’ itself, a participation in God’s love (SA, 729). This conception of ‘conversion’ and experience of the ‘heightened power of Love’ of the individual ‘self’ is arguably better placed in Vattimo’s concept of *kenosis/caritas*. Taylor presents the ‘conversion’ experience as ‘individualistic’ and experienced by only a few individuals. Taylor also proposes a ‘new language’ that each ‘convert’ possesses. It is a language which assists one to “break from the immanent order to a larger, more encompassing one...” (SA, 732). However, for Vattimo, the whole history of Western thought ‘experiences’ this conversion as a direct result of Christ’s *kenosis*. Vattimo proposes the limit of this experience of *kenosis* as *caritas/love/Christ*. With this, Vattimo provides ontological and phenomenological clarity to the historical and genealogical narrative of Taylor.

Taylor’s secularism hinges on his attempt to explain the role of secularity and still including ‘transcendence’. He does this by keeping the options for the ‘self’ either ‘open’ or ‘closed’ to transcendence. He proposes two alternative futures: 1) the secular, and 2) the sacred. These are ‘shutting out’ (secular) and ‘the breaking out’ (the sacred/conversion) of the immanent frame. The ‘breaking out’ is possible when ‘the radical message of the incarnation’ as the genuine source of Christianity is reaffirmed. The ‘reaffirmation of incarnation’ is arguably developed by Vattimo in his account of ‘salvation’. For Vattimo, the hermeneutics of salvation is coincidental with ‘the incarnation of Jesus’. Salvation is basically fulfilled in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus, but awaits a future and further fulfilment (AC, 59). The Paraclete, the Spirit of truth assists in this future fulfilment. It is through the Spirit that the Son becomes human in the womb of Mary. The Spirit is the relation and the hypostatizing of the love-understanding between the Father and the Son. Salvation takes shape, gives itself, and constitutes itself through history. Thus, whenever there is a ‘breaking out’ of the immanent frame or conversion, the event of ‘salvation’ is repeated in history.

II. Secularisation as Progress

In Taylor's account, the very locus of religious, social and political life undergoes a shift due to 'the nova effect'. The nova effect is explained through a triadic description of secularity: secularityⁱ, secularityⁱⁱ, and secularityⁱⁱⁱ. He offers three progressive stages in history. They are '*ancient régime*' (AR), 'the Age of Mobilisation' (AM), and 'the Age of Authenticity' (AA). Historically and phenomenologically, 'the self' in these stages undergoes transition towards modernity and secularity. It involves the retreat of faith and alternative religious forms. The modern religious life under secularisation is a destabilising and recomposing process and progress. Taylor pictures secularisation as an ongoing historical and phenomenological process including a progressive unfolding of belief-unbelief options.

Vattimo's secularisation inaugurates possibilities for a new interpretation of religion and ethics and offers a narrative of continuity and progress, providing philosophical depth to Taylor's secularism as a historically unfolding progress. Vattimo considers secularisation a process of transition, and a change of emphasis manifested in a historical awareness and belief in progress, which in itself is yet another secularisation (*EM*, 8). Furthermore, Vattimo sees secularisation as a continuity of modernity and 'value' that dominates and guides the 'self's' consciousness, primarily as faith in progress, which is both secularised faith and a faith in secularisation. Here, faith is seen as an historical process devoid of providential and meta-historical elements (*EM*, 100).

III. The Evolution of the Self and the *Kenotic* God

As discussed, Taylor's understanding of 'the self' as self-interpretive, disengaged, and ethical undergoes an irreversible and ongoing evolution both personal and historical. If it is an historical evolution, I argue, it should be an ontological and epistemic occurrence pertaining to the 'beingness' of the whole of creation. I argue that, based on this progressive historical evolution of 'self's understanding' of itself and of 'reality', Vattimo can further develop his concept of *kenosis*. In his recent writings, he broadens his understanding of a *kenotic* God. How is it possible to broaden the *kenotic* understanding of God? This is taken up by Taylor when he engages his notion of 'self'. 'The self' crosses over from the 'porous' to the 'buffered' stage, and then through

different stages of evolution in history to the formation of ‘the secular self’. In a similar fashion, the ‘self’s understanding of *kenosis* should be broadened, not confined to the boundaries of the Judeo-Christian religion. Vattimo asks, “Is God humbling himself only one among many pictures of God offered by known cultures? Do we abide with it only because we were accidentally born in the Judeo-Christian tradition, with the understanding that in the end we have to get rid of it (like Wittgenstein’s famous ladder in the barn) in order to get to God as he really is?”⁴⁰² The ‘self’s’ understanding of a *kenotic* God is to be broadened beyond the cultures of the Judeo-Christian religion. God is to be worshipped beyond the arbitrary boundaries that do not compel the self to reject God. Vattimo also opines that the individual self can find God when ‘the self’ lives “an open, hospitable, and tolerant way as much as possible, knowing that in the multitude of interpretations the only one that is certainly false is the one that claims to be identical with the truth.”⁴⁰³

IV. Disenchanted Self and *Caritas*

Disenchantment consists of delegitimizing all practices that deal with spirits, forces, and magic. For Nietzsche, it is a weakening of the beyond, an emptying heaven, and the death of God. Disenchantment as ‘weakening the beyond’ and ‘removing magic’ is understood further in terms of Vattimo’s *kenosis* which for him is another word for secularisation. As Christ self-empties himself and weakens metaphysicalism, Taylor’s individual ‘self’, disenchanting itself from the external forces, undergoes a *kenotic* experience. If so, can the ‘disenchanted’ or ‘secular’ self be a *kenotic* self? Whenever an individual ‘self’ goes beyond dictated boundaries to empty itself of the external forces of absoluteness, it is able to undergo a self-emptying that results in *caritas* as the evolving result. This replicates Christ’s life in one’s own individual life.

After the process of disenchantment, ‘the buffered mind’ is left. This ‘mind’ contains thoughts, and feelings. The space of the mind ‘within’ has the possibility of introspective self-awareness (SA, 30) which is constituted by ‘radical reflexivity’. For Vattimo, *caritas* is the result of *kenosis*. If so, *caritas* is the ‘thought’ or feeling’ or

⁴⁰² Gianni Vattimo, “Anatheism, Nihilism, and Weak Thought” (Dialogue with Gianni Vattimo) in *Reimagining the Sacred*, eds., Richard Kearney and Jens Zimmermann, New York: Columbia Press, 2015, pp. 128-148.

⁴⁰³ Gianni Vattimo, “Anatheism, Nihilism, and Weak Thought”, pp. 128-148.

‘meaning’ of *kenosis*. Whenever, an individual self disenchant itself, not enchanted by anything that makes its claim absolute, then there is the lived experience of *caritas*. Both Vattimo and Taylor’s hermeneutics of *kenosis* and disenchantment critiqued reconstructively result in *kenosis* and *caritas* becoming the inner disposition of the disenchanted self. Because of this, though cross-pressured in the immanent frame, in post-modernity an individual self has the choice either to ‘shut off’ or ‘break out’ of to conversion.

V. The Divine as the Worldly *Kenosis*

Taylor describes epistemology as CWS that discerns priority relations which tells what is learned before what, and what is inferred on the basis of what.⁴⁰⁴ Accordingly, the transcendent can be inferred from the natural/the secular/worldly. This argument functions as the foundation on which Vattimo can structure his ‘weak thought’, i.e., the transcendent can only be understood by inference from the natural, the weak, and the secular. Vattimo’s ‘weak thought’ transcends ‘its’ ‘weakness’ with the help of Taylor’s epistemology working as a CWS. It is from the weak, the natural, the immanent, that the sacred or transcendent can be properly conceived. Through the weakening of metaphysics and the self-emptying of Christ, a fuller experience of God becomes possible. Here, the divine becomes an inevitable part of human action and experience. This becomes the kernel of Incarnation and *kenosis*. The divine becoming this inevitable part of the human involves certain values, virtues, excellences of the independent, being disengaged, and reflexively controlling one’s own thought process. To properly perceive ‘the weak God’ one should be governed by an ethics of independence, self-control, self-responsibility, a refusal to conform to a set dogmatic authority, and an aversion to the comforts of the enchanted sacred cosmic world. In kenotic religious experience, divinity becomes part of humanity and its existence and the transcendent will have a necessary existential dwelling in the individual self. Accordingly, ‘the weak God’ becoming an inevitable part of human resembles the worldly *kenosis* of the divine.

⁴⁰⁴ Taylor, “What is secularity”, p. 60.

CHAPTER EIGHT

POST-SECULAR RETURN OF RELIGION

8.1 Post-Secular Return of Religion

The dialogical contrast between Vattimo and Taylor's 'secularism' aids our understanding of 'the Post-Secular Return of Religion'. Secularism, generally recognised as the prerequisite "of public democratic life, the requisite integument of international relations, the mere absence or negation of obsolescing religion, and the characterization of modernity,"⁴⁰⁵ is contested by Vattimo and Taylor. "Secularism and secularisation, are no longer regarded unquestionably as the vaunted pillars of modern democratic society, or modernity itself."⁴⁰⁶ Notwithstanding the unstable role of secularism, secular humanists continue to insist that despite post-secular claims, secularism remains 'the only' sure solution for negotiating sectarian conflict and a means for sustaining a democratic state. Vattimo's proactive thinking with regard to Nietzsche's 'death of God' does not imply the negation of religious orientation rather establishes through consequent secularism a new transformational religious experience. Taylor attempts to show the historical evolution of the death of God that neither exhausts the religious consciousness nor negates it, but offers a new direction to its appearance in post-modernity. Significantly, 'the hermeneutic of secularism' by Vattimo and Taylor has wider implications for contemporary philosophy.

The meaning of secularism is elucidated as by 'the death of God' (Nietzsche and Vattimo) and as induced by the Reform movements as suggested by Taylor, hence the importance of deconstruction and the overcoming of traditional metaphysics and epistemology. The 'post secular return of religion' for Taylor is an 'historical project'

⁴⁰⁵ Michael Rectenwald and Rochelle Almeida, "Introduction" in *Global Secularisms in a Post-Secular Age*, pp.1-26.

⁴⁰⁶ Michael Rectenwald and Rochelle Almeida give examples of the unstable role of secularism that led to the post-secular age. "They are 'the continued popularity of church going in the United States, the emergence of New Age spirituality in Western Europe, the growth of fundamentalist movements and religious political parties in the Muslim world, the evangelical revival sweeping through Latin America, and the upsurge of ethno-religious conflict in international affairs, 'religious resurgence' or the desecularisation of Peter Berger, the reassigning of a new for role for religion in politics and public life by Habermas, and the adoption of the term "post-secularism" to describe the relations between the secular and the religious in the current era, etc." (Michael Rectenwald and Rochelle Almeida, pp. 1-26)

and for Vattimo, it is 'a salvific action of God'. Moving on, can 'God' *return* from 'the death of God' in the 'post-secular age' where the role of secularism is unstable? What follows 'after the death of God' is 'post-Christian' rather than 'anti-Christian. It would seem that secularisation becomes the norm of all theological discourse and 'return of religion'. Consequently, the foundation of the post-secular return of religion is the 'death of God'. Besides, the "death of God has always been accompanied by various modes of resurrection."⁴⁰⁷ This is seen primarily in metaphysics where 'theological prejudices' are imbedded "in their entirety, even when they profess to be atheistic."⁴⁰⁸ When metaphysics poses itself as the supreme authority that pronounces 'there is no God', it simply re-enacts the role of God.

Christopher Watkin in *Difficult Atheism*, observes that atheism is 'difficult'⁴⁰⁹ and proposes 'imitative' and 'residual' atheisms that re-enact the role of God within 'the death of God'.⁴¹⁰ Imitative atheism is parasitic over the very framework it negates. It "replaces 'God' with a supposedly atheistic place-holder such as 'Man' or 'Reason', explicitly rejecting but implicitly imitating the theological categories of thinking..."⁴¹¹ It is residual because "it calls upon us to make do with the resulting debris or 'residue' of lost foundations (the 'death of God'), to live with finitude and imperfection, giving up on a satisfying transcendence and putting up with an unsatisfying immanence."⁴¹² John H. Smith claims that "the 'death of God' is in a crucial sense inscribed in the Christian identification of God with *logos*."⁴¹³ This is brought forth by the definition and identification of theology and critical reflection on God. Smith explains:

⁴⁰⁷ John D. Smith, *Dialogue between Faith and Reason: The Death and Return of God in Modern German Thought*, London: Cornell University Press, 2011, p. 9. Smith explains this with the examples in heavenly geometry, infinitesimal calculus, in morality, a dialecticized spirit, in the necessity of ritualized practice, in capitalism, or in variously defined spheres of "otherness." (John H. Smith, p. 9).

⁴⁰⁸ John D Caputo quotes Derrida in his review of *Difficult Atheism*, John D. Caputo, Syracuse University and Villanova University, <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/31269-difficult-atheism-post-theological-thinking-in-alain-badiou-jean-luc-nancy-and-quentin-meillassoux/>, accessed on 22/05/2016.

⁴⁰⁹ "Atheism," Watkin argues, is "difficult," a difficulty Nietzsche proposed to meet when he said "God is dead," where "God" meant not just the Deity but the whole system of "values," of "truth" and the "good," from Plato to the present, every attempt to establish a centre, a foundation of knowledge and morals, including modern physics, which is also an "interpretation." <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/31269-difficult-atheism-post-theological-thinking-in-alain-badiou-jean-luc-nancy-and-quentin-meillassoux/>, accessed on 22/05/2016.

⁴¹⁰ Christopher Watkin, *Difficult Atheism: Post-Theological Thinking in Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013, p. 1.

⁴¹¹ Christopher Watkin, p. 2.

⁴¹² Christopher Watkin, p. 133.

⁴¹³ John D. Smith, *Dialogue between Faith and Reason*, p. 2.

[T]hat ‘death,’ [...] does not come to Him from ‘outside’ Christian tradition but from within. It occurs through the different ways in which that *logos* comes to be identified over time, the different discursive spheres that bring their own “logics” to bear on understanding (the Christian) God. Because that *logos* is not *one* – that is, it takes the form, among others, of philology, natural science, ethics, Idealist philosophy, anthropology, ideology, existentialism, and ontology – the long process of God’s death also contains a constant returning to religion and of religion, as different thinkers again and again take on the task, ironically, not of killing but of understanding God with *logos*.⁴¹⁴

The notion of a Christian God is injected into the heart of the Western concept of *logos*, and the exercise of reason associated with philosophy cannot historically be practised in isolation from theology. Since, the *logos* is with God, or at least, in communion with God, philosophy will return again and again to the question of God. Consequently, the issue of religion will also return. The *logos* in God has focussed over the centuries on His death and the God in *logos* has led time and again to His return.⁴¹⁵ In Gadamer, *logos* is inextricably linked to language. Language and *logos* are constitutive of each other. Gadamer highlights the linguistic concept of *logos* as ‘word’ and especially as language. Each word dies when another is uttered. It means that, linguistically, language maintains itself in falling and rising of every word. However, God is not reduced to a word. God maintains himself not in what is said but in ‘saying’. Whatever is stated now leads to something else in language. The dying and returning of God is an on-going dialectic of *logos*. To commit to religion depends on this movement kept open to historical epoch. In addition, “the dissolution of the main philosophical theories that claimed to have done away with religion: positivist scientism, and Hegelian-later Marxist – historicism”⁴¹⁶ account for much of the ‘religious turn’ in recent Continental thought. Hence, ‘the trace of the sacred’ (God) is engraved in the very negation of ‘the sacred’. This framework of arguments makes conceivable the return of religion in a post-secular setting. Thus, I argue for the hermeneutical recovery of the divine after the death of the metaphysical God.

The hermeneutical recovery of the divine and the return of religion undermine the credibility of atheism. One of the attributes of returned religion in post-secularity is a position beyond ‘theism’ and ‘atheism’: ‘*anatheism*.’⁴¹⁷ Both Taylor and Vattimo

⁴¹⁴ John D. Smith, *Dialogue between Faith and Reason*, p. 2.

⁴¹⁵ John D. Smith, pp. 2-3.

⁴¹⁶ Gianni Vattimo, “After Onto-theology: Philosophy between Science and Religion”, in *Religion after Metaphysics*, ed., Mark A. Wrathall, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 29-36.

⁴¹⁷ ‘*Anatheism*’ refers to a “return to God after God’: a critical hermeneutic retrieval of sacred things that have passed but still bear a radical reminder, an unrealized potentiality or promise

concur in their philosophical exchange with Richard Kearney, not to disagree with ‘*anatheism*’ but to agree with his call to rediscover the sacred dimensions of ordinary life. For greater clarity about the features of ‘returned religion’, I will unveil developing trends in contemporary philosophy that define and attempt a hermeneutic effort to re-engage religion. Along with Vattimo and Taylor; Rowan Williams, John Milbank, and Richard Kearney unreservedly argue for the post-secular call to re-engage religion.

For Vattimo, ‘religious experience is an experience of leave taking’ and if ‘it’ is ‘a leave taking’ (a departure) ‘it’ is most likely to ‘return’ to where and to when ‘leave was taken’.⁴¹⁸ Religion comes to be experienced as a return. “In religion, something that we had thought irrevocably forgotten is made present again, a dominant trace is reawakened, a wound reopened, the repressed returns, and what we took to be an *Überwindung* is no more than a *Verwindung*, a long convalescence that has once again come to terms with the indelible trace of its sickness.”⁴¹⁹ It is a return to its origin, which is forgotten and is made present, an important point rediscovered, a wound reopened to heal, a crushed and alienated return that was not totally rejected and set aside but only underwent a period of convalescence. Vattimo understands this ‘return’ as the essential aspect of religious experience itself. The ‘death of God’ and thus ‘overcoming metaphysics’ is in fact only a ‘leave taking’ which helps to come to terms with the indelible trace of Christianity’s weakness and helps towards renewed reflection, leading to the original message of Christianity. Thus, the hermeneutical implication of ‘leave taking’ according to Vattimo is that the returned religion must also lead to a leave taking and so on *ad-infinitum*.

In Taylor’s three distinctive and coexisting interpretive modes, secularism is understood as a term according to which a new relationship with religion might occur. This is most clearly seen in *secularityiii*. *Secularityiii*, Taylor suggests is the historical and hermeneutic recovery of religion for human flourishing (exclusive humanism). It opens the possibility for a peaceful coexistence of religious and secular citizens

to be more fully realised in the future. In this way, *anatheism* may be understood as ‘after-faith’, which is more than a simple ‘after-thought’ or ‘after-effect’. (Richard Kearney, *Reimagining the Sacred: Richard Kearney Debates God*, eds., Richard Kearney and Jens Zimmermann. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, p. 7)

⁴¹⁸ Vattimo and Derrida, *Religion*, eds., Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998, p. 79.

⁴¹⁹ Vattimo and Derrida, *Religion*, p. 79.

(transcendent humanism).⁴²⁰ This can also be called a new Christian humanism, ‘open’ to the transcendent, and a possibility to ‘believe again’. Taylor also observes that “[the] return to religion is not actuated by a strong group or political identity or by a need to defend or recover a civilizational order against threatened dissolution, [but]... a profound dissatisfaction of a life encased entirely in the immanent order. The sense is that this life is empty, flat, devoid of higher purpose” (DC, 255). It is always a personal search encoded in the language of authenticity. One tries to find one’s own path or ‘oneself’. It does not mean that it must be self-enclosed, “that it cannot end up with a strong sense of the transcendent, or of devotion to something beyond” (DC, 256). “[This] new framework has a strongly individualistic component, but this will not necessarily mean that the content will be individuating. Many people will find themselves joining extremely powerful religious communities, because that’s where many people’s sense of the spiritual will lead them” (DC, 256).

Rowan Williams envisions a transformational non-dogmatic faith that can represent the social, imaginative world. If that faith is chaotic, it produces a cultural loss of courage, which affects the true spirit of faith itself; this can lead to the violence of fanaticism.⁴²¹ The principal aim of non-dogmatic religion is that it discovers the notion of human rights. Williams explains:

[It] does not just enforce my own claims, but about the demands of dignity in all persons; a notion of freedom that sees it as freedom for the other, not from them; a vision of democracy that is about the constant search for ways of ensuring that even the most marginal and deprived has a voice; a search for the convergent morality in public life, not a separation between minimal public order and private moral preferences; and a climate of artistic creation that evokes something of the richness of the human subject when it is opened up to the holy.⁴²²

It would be wrong to identify God with a dimension of an individual belief system, as something contained by it. This can be analytically conceptualized by means of ‘God’ as something that grows inside every individual. Even when one does not wish, God ripens. The “individual life has a task that can be defined only as that of allowing God to ‘ripen’ in increasingly visible ways.”⁴²³ Williams gives God a place that He chooses to be. However, God is not seen as a commodity waiting for an advantage to guarantee

⁴²⁰ For Taylor, exclusive humanism pertains to ‘the immanent frame’ that recognises no source of value beyond ‘the immanent frame’. However, transcendent humanism breaks out of the immanent frame and looks beyond to quest for spiritual and religious fullness.

⁴²¹ Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, London: Continuum Trade, 2012, p. 73.

⁴²² Rowan Williams, p. 74.

⁴²³ Rowan Williams, p. 316.

its place. He explains; “[t]he religious life, on this account would be taking on the task of ensuring a habitation for God, a God who does not guarantee for himself a place in the created world, a place alongside other agents, and so is visible only when a human life gives place, offers hospitality to God, so that this place, this identity, becomes testimony.”⁴²⁴

John Milbank’s ‘radical orthodoxy’⁴²⁵ proposes the possibility of a skeptical demolition of modern, secular social theory by demonstrating that all of the most important governing assumptions of such a theory are bound up with the modification or the rejection of orthodox Christian positions. He tries to free Christian theology from the shackles of secular reason by stepping outside the parameters imposed by modern thought to re-discover the roots of an alternative conceptual structure that better conforms to the Christian narrative. Thus, he articulates a meta-narrative, a transcendent factor, ‘even when it comes as the constant element in an immanent process’ to ‘pass critically beyond Nietzschean suspicion’ which arguably is the final and truly non-metaphysical mode of secular reason.⁴²⁶ There are two reasons for doing this: “the faith of humanism has become a substitute for a transcendent faith now only half-subscribed to, and secondly there is a perceived need to discover precisely how to fulfil Christian precepts about charity and freedom in contemporary society in an uncontroversial manner, involving cooperation with the majority of non-Christian fellow citizens.”⁴²⁷ Milbank attempts to recover an authentic and reasonable union of theology and philosophy, so that human beings can rediscover a vital, mysterious, and fructifying theological relationship to both God and the world. This would reverse the decline of Christianity in public life by restoring the intellectual legitimacy of Christian theology over secularism. It is evident that as for Vattimo, ‘return of religion’ is the

⁴²⁴ Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, pp. 318-319.

⁴²⁵ “[I]n the face of the secular demise of truth, [radical orthodoxy] seeks to reconfigure theological truth. The latter may indeed hover close to nihilism, since it, also, refuses a reduction of the indeterminate. Yet what finally distances it from nihilism is its proposal of the rational possibility, and the faithfully perceived actuality, of an indeterminacy that is not impersonal chaos but infinite interpersonal harmonious order, in which time participates...Radical Orthodoxy wishes to reach further in recovering and extending a fully Christianised ontology and practical philosophy consonant with authentic Christian doctrine.” (John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, *Radical Orthodoxy*, eds., London and New York: Routledge, 1999, pp. 1-2.)

⁴²⁶ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory; Beyond Secular Reason*, Second ed., Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990, p. 1.

⁴²⁷ John Milbank, p. 2.

dialectical outcome of secularism. Whereas, for Milbank, ‘re-discovering’ Christian theology is recovering it from ‘the shackles of secular reason’.

Richard Kearney makes an *anatheist* attempt to re-imagine the sacred. ‘*Ana*’ means ‘up in space or time’, ‘back again’, ‘anew’, and ‘after’.⁴²⁸ It is “a retrieval of past experience that moves forward, proffering new life to memory, giving a future to the past.”⁴²⁹ This ‘*aftering*’ “refers to any poetic movement of returning to God *after* God – God *again*, after the loss of God...the return of the lost one – in the case of religion, the lost God – may well be the return of a *more real* presence.”⁴³⁰ The prefix *ana* portrays the idea of retrieving, revisiting, reiterating, and repeating. Kearney explains it as “a critical hermeneutic retrieval of sacred things that have passed but still bear a radical reminder, an unrealized potentiality or promise to be more fully realized in the future.”⁴³¹ It is giving a future to the past in which the future was a potentiality or a promise. It “is the possibility of opening oneself, once again, to the original and enduring, the promise of a sacred stranger, an absolute other who comes as gift, call, summons, as invitation to hospitality and justice...*Anatheism* is a radical opening to someone or something that was lost and forgotten...”⁴³²

The post-secular attempt to re-engage with religion and the sacred, first of all, calls for a radical revival of religion as non-religious religion. The ‘God’ who returns is stripped of metaphysical qualities, claims, objectivity, and dogmatism, but ‘weak’ and ‘fragile’. For Vattimo, “it is a reversal of a Platonic programme: the philosopher now summons humans back to their historicity rather than to what is eternal.” (*FR*, 9) God is not outside the universe, but within, a potential promise always present in language. Secondly, it enables ‘the self’ to realise its own being and that of the other and thus to-be-for-the-[O]ther. Being-for-the-other is inevitable because the hermeneutic rediscovery of religion and the sacred is primarily aimed at human flourishing and the peaceful coexistence of the whole of creation. Thirdly, once we let go of our dogmatic convictions, charity takes precedence over truth. As a result of the kenotic ethic, *caritas*/charity takes precedence over *veritas*/truth. *Caritas* (*agape*) is a vocation lived with all its implications: one worships God exclusively in the form of service to others. *Caritas* ‘overcomes’ all the metaphysical and epistemological constructions such as

⁴²⁸ Richard Kearney, *Reimagining the Sacred*, p. 6.

⁴²⁹ Richard Kearney, p. 6.

⁴³⁰ Richard Kearney, pp. 6-7.

⁴³¹ Richard Kearney, p. 7.

⁴³² Richard Kearney, p. 9.

discipline and dogma. Finally, the ‘re-engaging of religion’ can be best explained as an ‘exodus’ and a ‘transition’ from ‘sacred’ to ‘secular’. It is both an ‘exodus’ and ‘transition’ from the constraints of modernity to post-modernity and post-secularity. ‘God,’ who is a ‘promise’ and ‘potential’, who ‘was’, ‘is’ and ‘will be’, is reimagined as ‘*kenosis/caritas*’. It is a plea to ‘release’ and ‘to live with’ ‘the other’ as the other. It is a demand to let particulars be themselves rather than having to conform to the structures of the prevailing ideological, political, or religious system.

8.1.1 Non-religious ‘Religion’

The hermeneutical deconstruction of both Vattimo and Taylor plays a vital role in the ‘return’ of religion and functions as an impetus for abandoning atheism. As discussed, secularisation is the result of an ontic *event* as well as an historical inevitability within Christianity, re-proposing the question of God after ‘the death of God’. Through hermeneutical ‘weakening’ and the possible ‘openness’ (breaking out) within ‘the immanent frame’, the weight and eternity of the objective structures are weakened. This hermeneutical rediscovery is an inevitable ‘progressive event’ in history whereby the ‘genuine’ nature of religion is reaffirmed. It “is a faithful recovery of kenotic Christianity and an orientation toward the very essence of the Christian faith – namely that of *agape/caritas*...which is more determinative than the collapse of Christendom” (ADG, 14). It is “a recovery, rediscovery, or retrieval of faith in the midst of a world marked by militant faiths and militant attacks on faith.”⁴³³ Following on, I would like to develop the following thesis.

I call the recovered, rediscovered religion, “**non-religious religion**” because ‘it’ is realised phenomenologically and ontically in contrast to the conventional religion. The phrase ‘non-religious religion’ is initially used by Vattimo to address his concept of the post-secular return of religion. As elucidated in Chapter Two, the word ‘religion’ draws its etymology from the Latin *religare*, meaning ‘bind’, ‘obligation,’ ‘bond,’ and ‘reverence.’ It means a binding respect for the metaphysical sacred, reverence for the dogmatic God, fear of the gods, a mode of worship, sanctity and holiness, etc. Vattimo and Taylor’s hermeneutical deconstruction of religion, draws out the possibility for a

⁴³³ John Caputo, “Anatheism and Radical Hermeneutics” (A Dialogue with John Caputo) in *Reimagining the Sacred: Richard Kearney Debates God*, eds., Richard Kearney and Jens Zimmermann, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, pp. 193-218.

post-secular form of religion that ‘unbundles’ the traditionally conceived obligations of religion. Again, I call this post-secular religion, a ‘non-religious religion’. Cicero’s understanding of religion is pertinent. According to Cicero, *religio* is derived from the verb *relegere* in its sense of “to re-read or go over a text”, from *re* ‘again’ and *legere* ‘read’.⁴³⁴ Hence, a possible explanation for this might be that ‘nonreligious religion’ is the traditional religion ‘re-read’ and ‘reconstructed’, whereby the original and purified form is re-discovered.⁴³⁵ For Vattimo, Christianity must be non-religious (i.e., post-religious⁴³⁶) because in Christianity there is a fundamental commitment to freedom. For him, true Christianity, stands for freedom, and stands against authoritarianism. It is freedom from truth (*ADG*, 37) and all forms of authoritarianism founded on metaphysics. Therefore, in contra-distinction to the customary meaning, ‘the returned religion’ places stress on ‘personal commitment’ and “devalues ritual and external practice in favour of inward adherence...It is taking religion seriously which means taking my religion personally, more devotionally, inwardly, and more committedly” (*DC*, 216). However, I suggest that this ‘return’ and ‘rediscovery’ is only a *Verwindung*, a return of the repressed from the ‘death of God hermeneutic nihilism’ and a return of the possibility of ‘breaking out’ of the immanent frame to a new buffered identity.

Distinguished thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – for example Søren Kierkegaard, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Martin Heidegger, and Nietzsche held the view that the loss of belief in a metaphysical God who is the ground of all existence and intelligibility, “opens up access to richer and more relevant ways for us to understand

⁴³⁴ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=religion>, accessed on 12/06/2016.

⁴³⁵ I see the ‘Non-religious religion’ as a ‘restoration’ of the authentic meaning of religion which is an historical consequence of its transformation (*Verwindung*). The non-religious religion, therefore, is transformative. It is consistent with Vattimo’s approach to the concept of concept of *kenosis* and *Verwindung* which are presented as unfolding and never static hermeneutic. Taylor, on the other hand speaks of more authentic personal conversion and fullness.

⁴³⁶ In Vattimo’s terms, ‘nonreligious’ means ‘post-religious,’ or, in Richard Kearney’s terms, ‘*ana*-christian after *anatheism*.’ In Vattimo’s own words, “I would say, today, it has become both possible and necessary to become *anatheist*, to become postreligious. Because, as a matter of fact, there is no foundational structure of Being we recognise, there is no ultimate or ulterior Being in itself, no noumenal substance hidden behind phenomenal appearance. That is why one is more Christian than Kantian.” Richard refers to the German pastor Bonhoeffer as an exemplary *anatheist* with his call for a “religionless” Christianity. It aims at an integration of faith in a secular world. “Especially when he speaks of a God without religion and metaphysics and asks: ‘How do we speak in a secular way about God? In what way are we religionless secular Christians’.” (Richard Kearney’s dialogue with Vattimo, “*Anatheism, Nihilism, and Weak Thought*”, pp. 135-136)

creation and for us to encounter the divine and the sacred.”⁴³⁷ At present, including Vattimo and Taylor, there are post-secular trends that advocate ‘a non-religious religion’. A few thinkers in this post-secular movement are: John Milbank (Radical Orthodoxy), Richard Kearney (*Anatheism*), Rowan Williams (God in Language), Julia Kristeva (Post-Christian Humanism) Alfred Whitehead (Process theology), Simon Critchley (Faithless Faith), and John Caputo (Radical Hermeneutics). There are also developing post-modern and post-secular theological trends, such as ‘theology of communal practice’, ‘post-liberal theology’, ‘post-metaphysical theology’, ‘deconstructive theology’ (Derrida), etc. Even Derrida suggests something ‘beyond’ his deconstruction. He undertakes deconstructive analysis “*in the name of something*, something that is affirmatively *in-deconstructible*.”⁴³⁸ For Derrida, these something beyond deconstruction are ‘justice’ and ‘the gift’.⁴³⁹ Caputo observes that “Derrida’s affirmation of the impossibility of justice and of the gift, is a gesture not of nihilistic despair but of *faith*: the desire for *something other* than what is obtained in the present world order.”⁴⁴⁰ These philosophers, and these schools of thought advocate that in post-modernity there are authentic and relevant ways for ‘the self’ to encounter ‘the divine’ and ‘the sacred’.

Furthermore, I argue that ‘the self’ in the ‘nonreligious religion’, ‘breaks out’ of ‘the immanent frame’ of ‘belief’ and ‘unbelief’ to ‘a certain faith’. The ‘self’ possesses a new buffered identity, with its insistence on increased distance from, or dis-identification with, forms of collective ritual and belonging, as well as scientific and atheistic rationalism. Here, Heidegger’s onto-theological conception of the sacred showing itself is ‘overcome’. Despite this ‘overcoming’, and changes in the historical ‘background’, **I leave the very object of the transcendent intact**. Here I adhere to Vattimo’s deconstructive hermeneutic of weak thought and *Verwindung* (not

⁴³⁷ Mark A. Wrathall, *Religion after Metaphysics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 1.

⁴³⁸ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Theology and the condition of postmodernity: a report on knowledge (of God)” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, eds., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp.3-25, quotes from John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell, A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1997, p. 128. For Derrida, this something, that cannot be deconstructed is justice. He says that deconstruction itself is justice.

⁴³⁹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, pp.3-25. Another religious theme to which Derrida gave much attention was ‘gift.’ For him, ‘gift’ is also impossible as ‘justice’. ‘Justice’ for Derrida is the impossible, in the sense that it is incalculable on the basis of factors that are already present. As for ‘gifts’, as soon as we give something to someone, we put that person in our debt, thus taking, not giving. The gift disappears in a web of calculation, interest, and measure.

⁴⁴⁰ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, pp. 3-25, quotes from John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 128.

Überwindung) of the absolute. Taylor and Vattimo's secularism function as an aid to reinstate, and a 'purified', and 'convalescenced' form of the transcendent. The 'death of God' leads to *kenosis* of God so that 'disenchantment' leads to re-enchantment. Conversely, in 'nonreligious religion' what is 'genuinely sacred' can only be transcendent and can only be God.⁴⁴¹ Consequently, the nonreligious religion goes beyond the traditional role of 1) an empowering devotion, 2) a neo-Durkheimian phenomenon⁴⁴² and, 3) a basis for moral/civilizational order (*DC*, 246). What is genuinely sacred can only be transcendent. A search for 'the sacred' shall occur in every individual. "It is a personal search, and can easily be coded in the language of authenticity: I am trying to find my path, or find myself" (*DC*, 256). As a result, it will be an "increasingly individual and unstructured faith, 'made to measure', to suit the needs and expectations of the individual."⁴⁴³ This 'personal search' to 'find my path' will aim at "the recovery of a biblical faith that gives emphasis not to the power and glory of a transcendental absolute but of God's suffering and love- from the 'Being' of God to the story of God's being with the poor, the hungry, and the outcast" (*ADG*, 9-10). However, this does not mean that 'this personal search' is self-enclosed. It experiences a strong sense of the transcendent, or of devotion to something beyond the self. The self is an outcast and returns to itself in a knowing and healing way. Though 'non-religious' religious outline has "a strong individualist component, this will not necessarily mean that the content will be individuating" (*DC*, 256).

Consistent with the observations of Taylor and Vattimo, I claim that outpacing the predictable mode and objectives of traditional religion, 'nonreligious religion' envisions an increasingly individual, unstructured' mode that aims at 'recovering the biblical faith' of kenotic charity. To that end, I note, Julia Kristeva's "post-Christian

⁴⁴¹ Peter E. Gordon, "The Place of the Sacred in the Absence of God: Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*" in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 69, No. 4, October 2008, pp. 647-673.

⁴⁴² "A neo-Durkheimian social form is one in which religion is partially disembedded from the traditional social structure of kinship and village life but comes to serve as an expression of a larger social identity, namely the newly emerging nation state in the West. The post-Westphalian regime of established churches—one realm, one church—is an example. And it is this regime that is closely related to the rise of modern nationalism, which may or may not shed its religious guise, but to which the churches in many ways remain oriented." <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2007/11/23/after-durkheim/>, accessed on 10/06/2016.

⁴⁴³ Pierpaolo Antonello, "Introduction" in *Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue; Gianni Vattimo and René Girard*, ed., William McCuaig, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, pp 1-22.

Humanism”⁴⁴⁴ and Nancy L. Eiesland’s “The Disabled God”.⁴⁴⁵ God’s suffering and love, together with His identity with the poor, hungry and outcast is manifested to ‘the self’ through the reflection of God’s transcendence in and through “love of Christ’s humanity”.⁴⁴⁶ Even in his glory, Christ appeared to his disciples with an ‘impaired’ and damaged body. “Here the wound is not a lack, because it is an integral part of his glory, itself given and perceived as a singularity.”⁴⁴⁷ Richard Kearney’s *anatheism* also pays central attention to Julia Kristeva’s sacred ‘thisness’⁴⁴⁸ and ‘disability’ that reflects Christ’s transcendence. For Kearney, it is paying attention to the “‘least of these’ – the forgotten and estranged...[and] hospitality to the stranger.”⁴⁴⁹ Here a paradigm shift happens ‘from the enclosed ‘Being’ of God to the story of God’s closeness to the poor, the hungry, and the outcast.’ The *eventual nature of truth* is manifested through this transition from ‘Being’ to ‘being’. Graham Ward observes that Derrida and other ‘death of God’ thinkers reject transcendentalism in their ‘deconstructive theology’. They “accept the Kantian distinction between the phenomenological and the noumenal, affirming a certain reading of Hegel that, in Jesus Christ, God as transcendent Being poured himself into the immanent created orders without remainder, and insisting that Wittgenstein was right speaking of things in this world, (and) emphasised the need to expunge theological discourse centred on

⁴⁴⁴ Richard Kearney in his dialogue with Julia Kristeva explains the meaning of “post-Christian Humanism.” “Post-Christian Humanism recognises the absolute need of human beings for ideals to endow life with meaning (the need to believe), and the tension of these ideals with our desires for knowledge, for hard-nosed realism (the need to know). In secular terms, Kristeva recognises the same tension Christianity has historically problematized as the relation of faith to reason. For her, religious ideals are important not least because they point to important failures of secularism in addressing human social needs.” (Richard Kearney, *New Humanism and the Need to Believe; Dialogue with Julia Kristeva*, pp. 93-94)

⁴⁴⁵ Julia Kristeva in her dialogue with Richard Kearney mentions Nancy L. Eiesland [1964-2009], who in her book *The Disabled God* describes Jesus as the only “Disabled God.” (Richard Kearney, p. 96)

⁴⁴⁶ Richard Kearney in his dialogue with Kristeva observes that “through love of Christ’s humanity, you continually receive from him your freedom. Continually, without solution, without end, infinitely free.” Kearney asks Kristeva; “Is this an affirmation of the sacred ‘thisness’ of everyday things – what Teresa of Avila calls the ‘pots and pans’, what she calls, ‘singularity’ and what he calls ‘epiphany’.” (Richard Kearney, p.95)

⁴⁴⁷ Kristeva develops her Scotist [Duns Scotus (1266- 1308)] ethics based on his idea of the incommensurable nature of each person, disabled persons included. Scotistic ethics is a more mystical ethics (Gilles Deleuze – atheistic ethics), not the social ethics of Thomas Aquinas.

⁴⁴⁸ Kristeva develops her notion of ‘thisness’ with the help of Duns Scotus. As against Thomas Aquinas, “truth is not in universal ideas, nor in opaque matter, but in ‘this one’ – this man here, this woman there; whence his (Scotistic) notion of haecceitas (thisness), of *hoc*, *haec*, or again *ecce*, ‘this’, the demonstrative indexing of an unnameable singularity... ‘I am the One who is’.” (Richard Kearney, p. 95)

⁴⁴⁹ Richard Kearney, p. 96.

metaphysical claims.”⁴⁵⁰ Jean-Luc Marion in his ‘post-metaphysical theology’ locates an extra-metaphysical “God without Being.”⁴⁵¹ Here “Being ‘is’ not, but occurs, and it constitutes the *a priori* temporal (not, versus the Neo-Kantians, transcendental) horizon for Dasein.”⁴⁵² Thus, “True Being never is, but sets itself on and sends itself, it trans-mits itself.”⁴⁵³ As Pope Benedict XVI observes; “for us truth is a ‘path’, a ‘continuous interrogation’, an ‘interior struggle’,...and “no one is the owner of truth.”⁴⁵⁴ For Vattimo, this indeed is the fuller revelation of the Christian message that ruptures all the barriers forced upon humanity. The transition of ‘Being’ to ‘being,’ strips God and mankind of sacred protections. Due to its incapacity to guarantee ‘truth’, ‘the Church’ becomes ‘weak’ which is its true destiny. As Pierpaolo Antonello observes, “the true destiny of Christianity is to extinguish itself, a weaker, less structured or less hierarchical church, more open to alterity, more of a de-Christianized Christianity...”⁴⁵⁵

Kearney’s *anatheistic* recovery of the sacred agrees with the post-atheistic reimagining of biblical faith, “liberated from the metaphysical trappings of a God of orthodoxy and power.”⁴⁵⁶ *Anatheism*, in short, means ‘God after God’. Nevertheless, it “is not some ineluctable dialectic leading to a final totality. It is not about uppercase Divinity, or Alpha God. [*Anatheism*] is about reimagining – and reliving – the sacred in the least of these. It is lowercase from beginning to end.”⁴⁵⁷ *Anatheism* is not about ‘Being’, but ‘being’; and is about ‘weakness’, about ‘possible openness’. This is also about a secularised recovery and reimagining of the sacred, and is not about John Milbank’s demolition of modern, secular social theory.⁴⁵⁸ Milbank, unlike Vattimo and Taylor endeavours to reclaim ‘the sacred’ by situating and resituating its concerns and activities within traditional Christian theological framework. “What emerges is a

⁴⁵⁰ Graham Ward, “Deconstructive Theology” in *Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed., Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 76-91.

⁴⁵¹ Thomas A. Carlson, “Post-metaphysical Theology” in *Cambridge Companion to Post-modern Theology*, Ed., Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 58-59.

⁴⁵² Matthew Edward Harris, *Essays on Gianni Vattimo*, p. xv.

⁴⁵³ Matthew Edward Harris, p. xv. Harris quotes Vattimo from “Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought,” p. 44.

⁴⁵⁴ Julia Kristeva in her dialogue with Richard Kearney quotes Pope Benedict XVI from his address during the interreligious meeting in Assisi in 2011, in which Kristeva also was present. (Richard Kearney, pp.97-98.)

⁴⁵⁵ Pierpaolo Antonello, “Introduction”, p.16.

⁴⁵⁶ Richard Kearney, *Reimagining the Sacred*, p. 99.

⁴⁵⁷ Richard Kearney, pp. 7-8.

⁴⁵⁸ John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, *Radical Orthodoxy*, p. 1.

contemporary theological project made possible by the self-conscious superficiality of today's secularism...[In] the face of the secular demise of truth, it (radical orthodoxy)⁴⁵⁹ seeks to reconfigure theological truth.”⁴⁶⁰ Milbank's 'radical orthodoxy' fails to penetrate into the centrality of 'secularism'. For Milbank, secularism is antithetical to theology, and he does not recognize the hermeneutic in which secularity is not opposed to transcendence. However, Rowan Williams envisages 'the immanent transcendence' of God through 'the use of language around faith and our perception and understanding of God'. The human uses his/her communicative means (language) 'a feature of the temporal world,' to perceive and understand God. If God is 'outside' the universe, it is difficult to use 'a feature of the temporal world' to represent something that does not abide by the conventions of the universe.⁴⁶¹ Derrida's 'anti-metaphysical account of language swings in the direction of Williams. Here, "language is pointed to itself, not to any realms or personages, revelations or hierarchies above, beyond or outside the secular world it constructed.”⁴⁶² John H. Smith's attributing the *logos* to the nature of God is relevant here. Reading John 1-2, Smith observes that *logos* meant 'word', 'speech', 'discourse', meanings that are related to the very nature of God, and likewise addresses the relationship connecting religion, language, philosophy and reason.⁴⁶³ As for Derrida, "now if, today, the 'question of religion' actually appears in a new and different light, if there is an unprecedented resurgence, both global and planetary, of this ageless thing, then what is at stake is language, certainly – more precisely the idiom, literality, writing, that forms the element of all revelation and all belief.”⁴⁶⁴ For Habermas, "the divine is always implicated in a process of using language, or, in his term, "linguistification.”⁴⁶⁵ Accordingly, 'God' becomes an/the 'immanent transcendent' who is describable and experienced in human language and human temporality. He is conceived and reconceived, constantly re-evaluated and re-engaged, critiqued in hermeneutical deconstructions, and liable to erring. 'He', as part of commonplace language, becomes an unquestionable *confidante*

⁴⁵⁹ John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, *Radical Orthodoxy*, p.2.

⁴⁶⁰ John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, P. 1.

⁴⁶¹ Rowan Williams, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language*, <http://www.biblesociety.org.au/news/like-river-review-edge-words-rowan-williams>, reviewed by Nick Mattiske, 15 February, 2015, accessed on 15/04/2016.

⁴⁶² Graham Ward, "Deconstructive Theology", pp. 76-91.

⁴⁶³ John H. Smith, *Dialogue between Faith and Reason*, p. 5.

⁴⁶⁴ John H. Smith, p. 6. Smith quotes from Derrida's *Religion*, p. 4.

⁴⁶⁵ John H. Smith p. 7. Smith refers to Habermas here.

and counterpart who recurrently engages and reorients Himself in making sense of the world and its priorities.

The most striking implication that emerges is that the ‘immanent transcendent’ implicit within ‘transcendental humanism’ replaces ‘the transcendental sacred’. The former does not deny the latter but gives space to ‘being’ and at the same time it upholds the position of the sacred. However, modernity, tends to deny the former due to the absolutism of the sacred which undermines the eventual nature of Being. However, ‘exclusive humanism’ in post-modernity and in ‘nonreligious religion’ is not acceptable to the traditional believer because the former exclusively denies the self’s prerogative to go beyond itself to ‘the Other’ only through whom he can realise his ‘beingness’.

Significantly, the most important feature of ‘nonreligious religion’ is its ‘spiritual’ dimension. James K. A. Smith who based his study on *A Secular Age*, states that this is exemplified in the British novelist Julian Barnes’ memoir, *Nothing To Be Frightened Of*, in which he writes, “I don’t believe in God, but I miss him.” Smith says, “[This] is almost everything we need to understand the modern phenomenon of ‘spiritual not religious’.”⁴⁶⁶ This is an increasingly popular phrase used to emphasise that ‘one’ no longer requires, and does not want to be part of an organised religion. For Taylor, ‘the breaking out’ of ‘the immanent frame’ leads to a personal ‘fullness’ and ‘conversion’ which leads ‘the self’ towards a ‘spiritual awakening’ within itself rather than to being part of an organised religion. Vattimo very clearly states that ‘conversion’ is not a revision to his childhood religion of Catholicism but rather to personal commitment. With the help of Rowan Williams, I distinguish a sense of ‘religious belonging’ from a ‘spiritual’ identity which Vattimo and Taylor do not strongly differentiate. The religious life is first of all “a way of conducting bodily life.”⁴⁶⁷ Conducting bodily life “has to do with gesture, place, sound, habit – and not first and foremost what is supposed to be going on inside.”⁴⁶⁸ For Williams, the whole idea of ‘inner life’ (the spiritual) “is properly, what we put together from a certain reading of visible lives; it is not a self-evident category, a cluster of intangible experiences or mental

⁴⁶⁶ Dr. James K. A. Smith at the March 2016 *Faith Angle Forum*, “Re-imagining Religion in a Secular Age” South Beach Miami, Florida, by Ethics and Public Policy Centre, <https://eppc.org/publications/dr-james-k-a-smith-at-the-march-2016-faith-angle-forum/>, accessed on 20/06/2016.

⁴⁶⁷ Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 313.

⁴⁶⁸ Rowan Williams, p. 313.

dispositions, but what comes to light as the sense, the intelligibility, of a certain pattern of acts.”⁴⁶⁹ He argues that it is “a fundamental mistake to consider belief itself, in its corporate religious context, as more or less exclusively as a mental event...”⁴⁷⁰ The ‘spiritual’ dimension of belief demands of the ‘bodily gestures’ an inner ‘welling-up’, a sense of plenitude which transforms the grey landscape of dawn into spaciousness, accompanied by ‘listening’ to the ‘self’, which is an attentiveness to nothing external.⁴⁷¹ “It is not a simple scrutiny of the self; it is really God who hearkens inside me. The most essential and the deepest in me hearkening unto the most essential and deepest in the other. God to God: loving attention to the other is a clearing of ‘the path You in them’.”⁴⁷² For David Martin, “it is loosening the monopoly” of the civilizational religion and nations who provided citizens with a code of conduct of life and death.⁴⁷³ Merold Westphal gives an explanation of ‘the inner dimension’ that distinguishes ‘the spiritual’ from ‘the religious’. He states, “I believe in, or at least hope for and am seeking some deeper meaning to my life than my hedonistic, consumeristic society offers me...”⁴⁷⁴

Furthermore, for Williams,

[R]eligion (religious) is understood precisely as the realm of limit and physical determination, including community and language, (which) carries with it a different mode of freedom from spirituality that is focused on the nature of the inner life as such. The ‘spiritual’ as a category can be applied to a range of phenomena or traditions of speech and action seems in current usage to work with a model of the self-selecting from this range a vocabulary and a set of practices which might serve as an existing sense of need, and which may add to self’s repertoire a degree of access to further experience.⁴⁷⁵

Religious life is limited. It has a physical determination. It has community and a set pattern of culture and language, whereas, the spiritual is focused entirely on the inner life. The spiritual tends to reject traditional organized religion as the sole or even the most valuable means of furthering spiritual growth. ‘Spiritual’ people embrace an

⁴⁶⁹ Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 313.

⁴⁷⁰ Rowan Williams, p. 313.

⁴⁷¹ Rowan Williams, p. 315. Williams gives the example of Etty Hillesum, “who died in Auschwitz in 1943, left behind her journal for the two years before her deportation and death, an extraordinarily full and absorbing document which chronicles a complex sexual and emotional life, a deepening in Rilke and Dostoevsky and a religious conviction of a very unconventional order...But amongst much that is arresting in what she writes, the repeated references to ‘learning to kneel’ give a clue to something of what she understood by learning to say ‘God’ without embarrassment.” (pp. 314-315)

⁴⁷² Rowan Williams, p. 315.

⁴⁷³ Rowan Williams, p. 86. Williams refers to David Martin.

⁴⁷⁴ Merold Westphal, “The End of Secular Thought” in *Rethinking Secularisation: Philosophy and Prophecy of a Secular Age*, eds., Herbert De Vriese and Gary Gabor, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, pp. 353-366.

⁴⁷⁵ Rowan Williams, p. 321.

individualized mode of ‘belief’ which includes choices within a wide range of practices other than those stipulated by organized religion. The ‘spiritual life’ is seen as a journey, intimately linked with the pursuit of personal growth and development. Williams observes, “[t]he spiritual dimension of all sorts of things, from school education to business practice, is recognized more and more seriously and even as a resource for health (emphasis added).”⁴⁷⁶ The ‘religious’ life involves a collective responsibility for corporately held teaching and discipline. In organized religion, I make over some aspect of myself for others; I may have to compromise my liberty and integrity. The practices may mean little to me but I become part of them. I may even practise certain codes of conduct that do not convince me. In contrast, ‘the spiritual’ opens up my personal conviction and integrity along a new path. It does not frustrate my sense of personal distinctiveness. My ordinary activities may be looked at against the background of ‘sacredness’. I do not have to hold on to ‘exclusive truthfulness’, rather I find ‘truth’ in my relationship with ‘the other’. It is more ‘inclusive’ and ‘liberating’ both for myself and ‘the other’.⁴⁷⁷

Conversely, one of the notable characteristics of post-secular religion is that most people find it difficult to commit themselves to a particular religious belief. The ‘post-secular religion’ avails the search for a spiritual capital independent of corporate religious affirmation. ‘This search’ independent of ‘religion’ can be called post-religious spirituality. This post-religious sensibility aims at “breaking down the barriers between different religious groups, the deconstruction of ghetto walls where such existed” (DC, 252). If post-secular religious sensibility can ‘break down the barriers’, traditional Christian faith can be redefined or is constantly in the process of redefining and recomposing itself in various ways in relation to the growth of non-Christian religions, “particularly those originating in the Orient, and the proliferation of New Age modes of practice, of views that bridge the humanist/spiritual/religious boundary, of practices that link spirituality and therapy” (DC, 253). For Danièle Hervieu-L  rger it is a “decoupling of belief and practice of a disembedding belief, belonging, and identity reference” (DC, 253). Grace Davey speaks of a “believing without belonging” (DC, 253). Taken together, the thrust of ‘nonreligious religion’ follows Secularityiii. It entails a ‘spiritual life’ constructed on secularityiii, “modelled after deconstruction that would be auto-deconstructive; self-correcting, removed as far

⁴⁷⁶ Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 85.

⁴⁷⁷ Rowan Williams, pp. 85-86.

as possible from the power games and rigid inflexibility of institutional life, where a minimal institutional architecture pushes towards some optional point, nearly but not all of the way towards anarchy, some point of creative ‘chaosmos’.⁴⁷⁸

8.1.2 Religion of Being for the Other

In Christian pre-modernity, the principal thought patterns circumscribed the metaphysical trinity: man, world, and God. During the seventeenth and eighteenth-century Reformations and the emergence of what is called modernity, the third element undergoes an alteration: man and world take precedence. The consequence of these changes results in post-modernity: man, world and ‘the Other’ become the central theme of Western thought and philosophy. In studying Taylor, Guido Vanheeswijck, observes that we have experienced and inherited three juxtaposed spiritual positions: “capacious theism (Man, World, God), exclusive humanism (Man and World), and Post-modernism (Man, World, the Other).”⁴⁷⁹ There is a continuity in this configuration, but in each stage the emphasis changes from one to the another. As a result of this reconfiguration and its initiated secularisation, ‘God’ in post-modernity, re-appears distinctively as ‘the Other’, exploring a continuous searching for an answer to the relation between transcendence and immanence. The traces of the return of the ‘Other’ can be found in Nietzsche’s Dionysos,⁴⁸⁰ and in Heidegger’s philosophy of ‘Being’.⁴⁸¹ Post-Heideggerian thinkers like Emmanuel Levinas, Gianni Vattimo, Rene Girard, and Charles Taylor, try “against the backdrop of Heidegger’s critique of the onto-theological structure of our religious language, to find new formulations”⁴⁸² to

⁴⁷⁸ John D. Caputo, *What would Jesus Deconstruct: The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church*, MI, USA: Baker Publishing Group, 2007, p. 137.

⁴⁷⁹ Guido Vanheeswijck, “The End of Secularisation,” in *Rethinking Secularisation: Philosophy and the Prophecy of a Secular Age*, eds., Herbert De Vriese and Gary Gabor, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, pp. 1-26, Charles Taylor in *A Catholic Modernity*, pp. 13-37, and later in *A Secular Age* pp. 610-614, elaborates these distinctions between the world, man and God, through his historical analysis of the emergence of secularityiii where ‘God’ returns as one possible option among others.

⁴⁸⁰ Guido Vanheeswijck, pp.1-26. “Following Nietzsche, current French philosophy has given a central role to the Dionysian as well and in this way put forward a specific interpretation of the transcendent” (p. 21).

⁴⁸¹ Guido Vanheeswijck, pp.1-26. Heidegger’s philosophy of Being, and his analysis of Western metaphysics as a form of ‘calculating thinking’ rises against the backdrop of the nominalistic otherness of God, transformed by Heidegger into the abyss of Being. Heidegger’s interpretation is the reinforcement of a nominalistic interpretation of God, which stresses its incomprehensibility, its abysmal character, couched in an idiosyncratic and sometimes as incomprehensible terminology as the Other to which it refers, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁸² Guido Vanheeswijck, pp.1-26.

speak about ‘the Other’ and transcendence after ‘God’. However, a pertinent disagreement remains as to whether the return of ‘the Other’ is ‘wholly’ transcendent or immanent. In the post-secular and post-modern return of ‘non-religious religion,’ Vattimo’s Nietzschean death of God and ‘weak thought’ rejects the ‘(Wholly) Other’.⁴⁸³ He repudiates the ‘Other’ with a capital ‘O’. Taylor, however, does not deny the ‘possibility’ of the ‘Other’, in the full transcendent sense.

Vattimo’s historical approach to hermeneutics as nihilistic prohibits all interest in the possibility of ‘vertical transcendence’. The metaphysical absolutism of ‘Being’ and the ‘Other’ is completely displaced. The ‘Other’ as a wholly Other, “is incomprehensible, contradicts human reason, and thwarts our plans and ambitions.”⁴⁸⁴ Vattimo’s weak interpretation envisions a “‘horizontal transcendence’ of the linguistically-constituted epochs into which we are thrown”.⁴⁸⁵ Vattimo and Taylor’s hermeneutical deconstruction of secularism, that is, their *Verwindung* of metaphysics and epistemology, opens the possibility for an irreducible plurality of interpretations centering on metaphysical traces. According to Matthew E. Harris, the vocation of the philosopher today is to seek out ‘the other’ (with a lower case ‘o’) in order to further weaken these metaphysical traces,⁴⁸⁶ and yet, this is also to recover them in a secular form. It means that although Vattimo rejects a wholly ‘Other’ God, he accepts the ‘Other’ through the hermeneutic of *Verwindung*. Phenomenologically, it is an invitation to greater involvement with the other; an incarnation of the ‘Other’ in each one of us. Conversely, he uses the terms ‘Being’ and ‘Other’ in a manner that is now altered and healed through his weak/kenotic interpretation as ‘being’ and ‘other’. He explains:

[I]f we consider the meaning of creation and redemption to be *kenosis*, as I believe we must in the light of the gospel, we will probably have to concede that the continuity of God and the world established by classical metaphysics is more authentically ‘kenotic’ than the transcendence attributed to God in naming him ‘the wholly Other’ (B, 83, and AC, 38).

He takes incarnation seriously. Incarnation brings the message of weakness, humiliation and friendship ‘for the other’ (B, 95). In incarnation, God ‘is akin to finitude and nature: there is a fundamental continuity between God and world, between God and humanity’ (AC, 27). Though Vattimo rejects the ‘Other’, incarnation opens

⁴⁸³ The concept of “the Wholly Other,” is associated with early 20th century Dialectical Theology. Barth and Otto use this as the descriptor of their theology.

⁴⁸⁴ Frederick Depoortere, *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy*, p. 14.

⁴⁸⁵ Matthew E. Harris, *Essays on Gianni Vattimo*, p. 87.

⁴⁸⁶ Matthew E. Harris, p. 87.

the possibility to encounter the 'Other' in the 'other'.⁴⁸⁷ It is the individual self's freedom to be 'closed' or 'open' to conversion and fullness within the 'immanent frame'. It is a drawing out of oneself, of what is already there, a possibility to be open to further historical destiny (Heidegger) of the individual self. Since Vattimo considers language to be metaphorical, the death of God frees metaphor and language (*BI*, 54). This not only liberates language but also opens the possibility of an encounter with God-beyond-God, made possible through incarnation.⁴⁸⁸

Vattimo and Taylor's hermeneutic suggests that the 'Other' as a 'horizontal transcendence' is realized through the *Verwindung* of all 'strong' claims. It is within *kenotic* charity and *agape*, in the experience of the 'sacred', it is the 'transcendent' in the 'other' in 'dialogue' and loving 'friendship'. Thus, re-discovered post-secular religion is a religion of 'being-for-the-(O)ther'. The 'Other' in the 're-discovered' religion is not that of Levinas and Derrida: the capital 'O' of the other owes its capital to *Verwindung* and incarnation, leading to *kenotic* charity and *agape* as realized in the 'other'. Hence, what is important is not the technique of 'hermeneutics' but rather 'the meaning', expression and 'sense' of its relation to humans as self-interpreting animals. 'Meaning' gives an ontological and teleological purpose to an individual's life achieved through a dialogical relationship with the 'other' which presupposes a renewed religious, ethical, and moral involvement. Tellingly, the hermeneutical deconstruction of secularisation by Vattimo and Taylor gives 'meaning' to the 'Other' in the 'other' of post-modernity.

According to Taylor, to acknowledge the transcendent involves changing one's identity. He explains this with the help of the *anatta* of Buddhism. *Annatta* means 'a change from 'self' to 'no self'. It is a radical de-centering of the self in relation to God and the other. It is centering one's will to the 'other' through the 'Other' (*CM*, 21). As for Levinas, "the self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world, within the ontology of sameness."⁴⁸⁹ Rowan Williams

⁴⁸⁷ I differentiate between 'the Other' and 'the other'. 'The Other' stands for the conventionally understood transcendental God or absolute, and 'the other' means the immanent, the created, the other individual that is not me, the particular situation etc.

⁴⁸⁸ Matthew E. Harris, *Essays on Gianni Vattimo*, pp. 92-93.

⁴⁸⁹ From an excerpt from a longer dialogue, Levinas presents a brief exposition of his theory of the Other. Reprinted from "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed., Richard A. Cohen, New York: State University of New York Press, <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/responsibility-in-the-face-of-the-other/3/#>, accessed on 22/06/2016.

observes that the specific reality of the human self is not totally rejected, “but it is dethroned or decentered. To discover who I am, I need to discover the relation in which I stand to an active, prior Other, to a transcendent creator: I do not first sort out who I am and then seek for resources to sustain that identity.”⁴⁹⁰ The dethroning and decentering of oneself happens through a dialectical relationship with the other. It is because, for Taylor, “one of the crucial features of the human condition that has been rendered almost invisible by the overwhelmingly monological bent of mainstream modern philosophy is his (man’s) dialogical nature.”⁴⁹¹ Taylor stresses the unique role language plays in recognizing the ‘significant other’.⁴⁹²

For Vattimo, it means turning inward to oneself. When “you turn inward you must also try to listen to others like you” (*ADG*, 42). Who are ‘others like you?’ Matthew E. Harris clarifies that “[I]t is likely that Vattimo considers those ‘like you’ only as those people interested in listening to the sending of Being as ‘weakening’, that ‘like you’ means those people who realize both they and their beliefs are contingent and historically situated; in other words, that one should only listen to other people who have put friendship before objective truth.”⁴⁹³ Putting friendship before objective truth frees one from the addiction to power, present presence, present Being, but listening to the forgotten, to the loser, and to the history of the forgotten.⁴⁹⁴ For Vattimo, not listening to the other is a sin. Listening to the other is thinking back, an *andenken*, paying attention to what was lost.⁴⁹⁵ Listening to the other is an attitude of revolutionary nihilism: “Now that God is dead we can love one another!”⁴⁹⁶ This leads to the acceptance and return of the repressed and to the embrace of the ‘other’.⁴⁹⁷ It

⁴⁹⁰ Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, 91.

⁴⁹¹ Charles Taylor, K. Anthony Appiah, Jürgen Habermas, Steven C. Rockefeller, Michael Walzer, Susan Wolf, *Multiculturalism*, ed., Amy Guttmann, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University, 1994, p. 32.

⁴⁹² “We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human language of expression....Language is taken in a broader sense here, covering not only the words we speak, but also other modes of expression whereby we define ourselves, including the “languages” of art, of gesture, of love, and the like (of religion and religious language as well)...we learn these modes of expression through exchange with others...the significant other.” (Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism*, 32).

⁴⁹³ Matthew E. Harris, *Essays on Gianni Vattimo*, p. 96.

⁴⁹⁴ Richard Kearney, *Reimagining the Sacred*, Dialogue with Vattimo, p. 138.

⁴⁹⁵ Vattimo here gives the example of the Pope (supposedly) having a conversation with the Dalai Lama. “Even the pope, when he meets the Dalai Lama, must listen to his other, mustn’t he? He does not behave as if the Dalai Lama’s soul is lost. *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*! No. Even the pope nowadays is an atheist – at least he appears so in dialogue with others, in welcoming strangers...an atheist hospitality...” (Richard Kearney, p. 141).

⁴⁹⁶ Richard Kearney, *Reimagining the Sacred*, Dialogue with Vattimo, p. 138.

⁴⁹⁷ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, p. 16.

orients one towards a “humanity concerned with the desire for the ‘Other’ in every ‘other’, looking through and with the history of all, – Jews, Christians, Muslims, Confucians, Shintoists, and others – without ignoring their hostilities, reducing their differences, or submitting to their institutions.”⁴⁹⁸ Significantly, if re-discovered religion in post-secularity is a religion of ‘being-for-the-(O)ther, it is concerned with desire for the ‘Other’ in “every” ‘other’. “Every” other here leads to a pluralistic conception of the present situation. “Every other” has a broad implication of including all other believers, political ideologies, cultural and linguistic diversities. It relativizes single and absolute truth claims of any sort.

From the religious perspective Rowan Williams describes pluralism as “the conviction that no particular religious tradition has the full or final truth: each perceives a valid but incomplete part of it.”⁴⁹⁹ Pluralism implies that no faith can or should make claims for itself as the only route to perfection or salvation. Pluralism means religious inclusivism, tolerance, dialogue, and diversity. It indicates also that no country, political party, culture, or language, have absolute claim to superiority or supremacy over the other. Pluralism envisions a society composed of different lifestyles, philosophies, and options. Williams gives the example of India, declaring itself a secular state with independence making a clear option for a certain kind of public and political neutrality, “acknowledging that to be a citizen of India could not be something that depended on any particular communal identity, and that the state could not intervene in religious disagreements except in so far as they become socially disruptive.”⁵⁰⁰ Nicholas Davey notes that “the commitments to the very truths which individuate my community from another actually impel me ironically towards engagement with the foreign community.”⁵⁰¹ For Davey, it is a hermeneutic interdependence because one does not have final command or authority over the meanings that shape one’s horizon, and adds that “I have to grant the logical possibility that the other can perhaps reveal something of the truths that remain hidden to me.”⁵⁰² Hence, pluralistic hermeneutics can bridge the dichotomies growing around the planet where

⁴⁹⁸ Richard Kearney quotes Julia Kristeva from *Teresa, My Love*, in *Reimagining the Sacred*, p. 94.

⁴⁹⁹ Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 126.

⁵⁰⁰ Rowan Williams, p. 127.

⁵⁰¹ Nicholas Davey, “Towards a Community of the Plural: Philosophical Pluralism, Hermeneutics and Practice,” in *Phenomenological Perspectives on Plurality*, (Studies in Contemporary Phenomenology) ed., Gert-Jan van der Heiden, Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2014, pp. 88-102.

⁵⁰² Nicholas Davey, pp. 88-102.

my truth claims do open a space for the ‘other’, to reveal much more clearly the truth that is partially hidden within me because the ‘other’ is not alienated from me.

For Taylor, pluralism is the most significant characteristic of ‘the secular age’. The secular age “is a pluralist world, in which many forms of belief and unbelief jostle, and hence fragile each other” (SA, 531). Being the most important feature of ‘the secular age’, pluralism should be the uncontested starting point of contemporary liberal, political and religious theory. Political and religious pluralism will survive and become a signature of post-modernity, if seen as the outgrowth of the historic tensions about sovereignty, absolutism, and the integrity of local Christian communities.⁵⁰³ If every society in the West were genuinely Christian, the political philosophy of every society would embrace religious variety and cultural hospitality. Williams also observes that true religion upholds human rights, that is, it does not enforce religious claims and respects, and demands the dignity of all persons. True religion is all about freedom to and for the other, and not freedom from the other. It is “a vision of democracy that is about the constant search for ways of ensuring that even the most marginal and deprived has a voice; a search for the convergent morality in public life, not a separation between minimal public order and private moral preferences; and a climate of artistic creation that evokes something of the richness of the human subject when it is opened up to the holy.”⁵⁰⁴

Pluralism, conversely, is about recognizing the ‘other’ in his/her richness and depravity. It is a political, religious, cultural, and linguistic liberalism that attributes catholicity to the returned non-religious religion. The word *katholou* can have two related meanings implying universality and wholeness. Taylor parses these as universality through wholeness (CM, 14). It is not about striving to make other beliefs, nations, and cultures to fit our own frameworks. For Taylor (and Vattimo), the event of incarnation, ‘the weaving of God’s life into human lives that are different, plural, and irreducible to each other’, brings redemption, and this results in reconciliation and oneness. “This is the oneness of diverse beings who come to see that they cannot attain wholeness alone, that their complementarity is essential, rather than of beings who come to accept that they are ultimately identical. Or perhaps we might put it: both complementarity and identity will be part of our ultimate oneness” (CM, 14). It is

⁵⁰³ Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 80.

⁵⁰⁴ Rowan Williams, p. 74.

overcoming the ‘historical temptation’ to privilege ‘sameness’, enclosing as many as possible in one particular religion. Catholicity has failed, “because it fails wholeness; unity bought at the price of suppressing something of the diversity in the humanity that God created; unity of the part masquerading as the whole” (CM, 14). Each religion, polity, and culture striving for universality through wholeness is truly ‘Catholic’, post-modern and post-secular. It aims at a ‘unity-across-difference, as against unity-through-identity’ (CM, 14). Tellingly, the characteristic feature of returned religion is that the ‘other’ will play a significant role in unveiling what is hidden within ourselves. Accordingly, “I come to appreciate that his or her way of responding differently to a subject matter of his or her own very different way of thinking about an existential concern is capable of revealing something about their own horizon such that I come to think about an aspect of myself and my commitments differently.”⁵⁰⁵ Davey observes that through a dialogic hermeneutic, “a meaning can be better expressed, a value more comprehensively embodied.”⁵⁰⁶ Appreciating his or her own difference, and learning to learn from him or her that I understand myself better and change or adapt my convictions accordingly, is the ethics of alterity possible only through love/*caritas*, and not in the stringent claims of truth. *Caritas*, in this sense is the divine call to the hermeneutic of friendship which is one of the features of rediscovered and returned religion. Since *caritas* is the result of secularisation, narratives of secularisation can be further individually constructed in dialogue with the ‘other’. By ‘other’, I also mean, art, literature, aesthetics, language, society as a whole, and in the context of a given culture, religion, environmental equilibrium, and climate change.

The relationship between the ‘I’ and the ‘other’ is sustained only through affirming a relationship with the world (the environment). The planet’s history is not exhausted by the history of one particular culture and technology, but is sustained and preserved by each human being. Here, I suggest a more comprehensive meaning to “being-for-the-other”; unfolding the prospect of relating to ‘the other’ to nature and the environment. The alterity in post-modernity giving priority to the hermeneutic of pluralism embraces horizontal transcendence. In this hermeneutic of pluralism, the whole of nature is to be looked at as ‘the other’. “We cannot as humans oblige the environment to follow

⁵⁰⁵ Nicholas Davey, “Towards a Community of the Plural: Philosophical Pluralism, Hermeneutics and Practice,” pp. 88-102.

⁵⁰⁶ Nicholas Davey, pp. 88-102.

our agenda in all things, and the human force is incapable of changing”⁵⁰⁷ any of the natural laws of the world. As ‘the other’ the human person is distinct, one’s genuine religiosity leads to respect, and aims to protect and sustain him/her - so too with ‘the environment’ and the material world. This entails that we do not consider relationships centered on us, or our agendas, but “liberating persons and environments from possession and the exploitation that comes from it.”⁵⁰⁸ ‘Liberating’ is to be free of ‘claims and possessions’ and ‘to stand back’ allowing nature to take its course. This does not entail a passivity but rather a taking responsibility to preserve and direct the powers of nature. A truer religious “fulfilment is bound up with the work of conserving and focusing those powers (in nature), and the exercise of this work...(should) draw out potential treasures in the powers of nature and so realise the convergent process of humanity and nature discovering in collaboration what they can become.”⁵⁰⁹ This preservation shall be a shared responsibility for deliberately protecting the environment from exploitation and “to secure a space for the natural order to exist unharmed.”⁵¹⁰ One’s responsibility to preserve and sustain the natural order should feed into responses to wider economic and social malaises. The responsibility of protecting the future of the non-human world, is a bond with the ‘Other’, and appropriately honours the special dignity given to the ‘other’. According to Williams, “living in a way that honours rather than threatens the planet is a living out...what we are as human beings (in the image of God).”⁵¹¹ Living in a way that honours the other is a constant reorientation on one’s part towards upholding justice regarding what is growth, wealth, and climate change. It is an invitation to have a renewed approach to ecology, and climate change, that challenges one to change one’s present pattern of life towards a transformation of individual and social goals. Each pattern of growth either individual or collective must be oriented towards a pluralistic approach to the whole of creation leading to the ‘Other’, (vertical transcendence) through *caritas*; leading to the ‘other’ (horizontal transcendence).

⁵⁰⁷ Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 185.

⁵⁰⁸ Rowan Williams, p. 186.

⁵⁰⁹ Rowan Williams, pp. 187-188.

⁵¹⁰ Rowan Williams, p. 188.

⁵¹¹ Rowan Williams, p. 203.

8.1.3 *Caritas* Takes Precedence over *Veritas*

The objectivism of classical metaphysics, (and thus the absoluteness of ‘truth’ in Western thought) underwent a paradigm shift with the introduction of ‘weak thought’. The weakening/secularisation/*Verwindung* of metaphysics leading to the dissolution of all strong truth claims parallels *kenosis*. According to Erick Meganck, “Vattimo takes *kenosis* as the model of the destiny of ontology”;⁵¹² ‘the God-returned’ distances himself from the Eternal Origin and His transcendent divinity. Vattimo argues that truth becomes a purely ‘worldly’ matter without any external, metaphysical or sacred reference.⁵¹³ The *eventual* nature of ‘truth’ and ‘being’ provides the dynamic for the ongoing process of the weakening of reality through secularisation/*kenosis*.

For Vattimo, the only possible limit/end of secularisation/*kenosis* is the hermeneutic of *caritas*/charity (*B*, 62-65, *AC*, 41 and 48, *ADG*, 39). *Caritas* leads to a profound understanding of the biblical message, which has an impact on ‘all spheres of life as the post-modern and nihilistic outcome of modernisation seen effectively in cultural, political, and social pluralism’. Significantly, *caritas* is one of the prominent features of the post-modern return to or reimagined religion. Vattimo, in *Belief*, articulates that the return and realization of Christianity is possible through preference for *love*, rather than for justice, severity, and the majesty of God (*B*, 64). Charity could be thought of as “a meta-rule that obliges and pushes us to accept the different language games, the different rules of the language games” (*FR*, 59).

The word ‘*caritas*’ has its root in the old French *charité*, meaning charity, mercy, compassion, as well as in the Latin *caritatem*, meaning costliness, esteem, affection. In the Vulgate, *caritas* is often used as the translation of the Greek *agape*, meaning ‘love’, especially Christian love for fellow man, and friendship.⁵¹⁴ For Ricoeur, love is “initially a discourse of praise, where in praising, one rejoices over the view of one object set above all other objects of one’s concern - it is rejoicing, seeing, and setting above all else...”⁵¹⁵ Augustine embraces a break with the classical Roman notion of friendship (*amicitia*) ‘self-denying, neighbour preferring’ friendship for *caritas*. For

⁵¹² Erick Meganck, “God Returns as Nihilist Caritas, Secularization According to Gianni Vattimo”, in *Springer*, published online: 1 July 2015, Science and Business Media Dordrecht 2015, SOPHIA (2015) 54, pp. 363–379, DOI 10.1007/s11841-015-0479-8, accessed on 22/07/2016.

⁵¹³ Erick Meganck, pp. 363-379.

⁵¹⁴ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=charity>, accessed on 22/07/2016.

⁵¹⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination*, trans., David Pellauer and eds., Mark I. Wallace, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, p. 317.

Augustine, “*caritas* is love seeking its proper object and resting in it once possessed; it is cleaving to God.”⁵¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas says, “charity loves a goodness that our senses cannot perceive: God’s goodness, which only our minds can know.”⁵¹⁷ Marion develops the concept of ‘love’ which is able to “transcend my lived experiences and my consciousness in order to reach a pure alterity.”⁵¹⁸ *Caritas* can also be understood in relation to Taylor’s use of *agape*. For Taylor, *agape* is not just our love for God, but God’s love for us. This divine love namely purifies and empowers our own love. Timothy Jackson says that *agape* entails “unconditional commitment to the good of others” and “equal regard for the worth of other.”⁵¹⁹

Caritas is the root for such concepts as ‘costliness’, ‘setting above all else’, ‘resting in the object once possessed’, ‘God’s goodness’, ‘pure alterity’, ‘*agape*’, ‘unconditional commitment’, etc. I use *caritas*, charity, and love interchangeably. Vattimo formulates his own variant of a nihilistic hermeneutic, which he envisions as positive, and affirmative. Through the transformative and creative potential of this hermeneutic thinking, he tries to overcome the problems of the onto-theological metaphysics of Heidegger and Nietzsche. Significantly, God’s return in *caritas* has to be understood as a postmodern epistemo-theological return. According to Erick Meganck, “[R]evelation is now completely accomplished in a nihilistic, endless way: Christianity means keeping thought away from petrifying into truth, fact, and reality. It is pure Christian *caritas* in that it does away with the violence of the metaphysical and sacred and thereby discourages all human attempts towards violence.”⁵²⁰ Even Christ’s message grew with history through the process of the weakening of moral-metaphysical truth claims, ultimately leading to *caritas*. The ‘growth’ of Christ’s message further diffused the dogmatic teachings of the Church leading to the ‘weak’ interpretation of strong claims resulting in alterity and *caritas*. As already mentioned in Chapter Four, “the future of Christianity is thus more purified and based on pure love” (*ADG*, 45).

⁵¹⁶ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr., Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall: 1958), Book 3.10. See also *Tractates on the First Epistle*, 2.8.2.

⁵¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed., Timothy MacDermott, Methuen: London, 1991, P. 351.

⁵¹⁸ Jean Luc-Marion, *A Prolegomena to Charity*, Fordham University Press: New York, 2002, p. 78.

⁵¹⁹ Pelton, L.H., “Love and justice,” Presented at the 9th World Congress of the International Society for Universal Dialogue, in Olympia, Greece, June 22-27, 2012, Published in conference proceedings, in *Skepsis: A Journal for Philosophy and Inter-Disciplinary Research*, XXII/i, 152-162.

⁵²⁰ Erick Meganck, “God Returns as Nihilist Caritas, Secularization According to Gianni Vattimo” pp. 363-379.

The hermeneutical consequence of ‘truth’ is that it is increasingly determined by agreement with others. Vattimo observes, “We do not, and perhaps cannot, agree when we have found the truth, but we may say that at least we have found some truth when we have agreed upon something” (*ADG*, 43, *CTWF*, 51). Truth is respecting the opinion of others, their choices and their values. Something becomes the truth when it is shared. It is the dissolution of truth claims that allows ‘the truth’ in mutual agreement and alterity, to emerge as *caritas*. If there is something that is true, it is not something given to someone once and for all. It must happen in dialogue, which in itself is the result of charity. Thomas G. Guarino observes that the actual truth of every religion should be the renunciation of “aggressive truth claims and the diffusion of religious particularity into secularised universality, thereby fostering a sense of fraternity and solidarity among all people.”⁵²¹ The whole of the Mosaic law was diffused into the love of God and neighbour. The similar theme orients the post-modern returned religion, “whereby a whole host of doctrinal and moral teaching are being reduced, or better still, diffused into *caritas*.”⁵²² Brian Schroeder, in conjunction with Vattimo observes that truth is an event, that is, a transformative occurrence, with an experiential character. The experience of truth is connected to the nihilistic hermeneutic and is emancipatory leading towards *caritas*.⁵²³ For Franca D’Agostino, truth should be seen in a rhetorical rather than logical perspective. There is ‘no truth properly’ but what is experienced is an ‘intersubjective agreement on the topics of common use’. “We are in fact exploring the nature and extension of that agreement”⁵²⁴ in mutual friendship. According to Gaetano Chiurazzi, “every experience of truth requires an interpretation, and therefore that truth is interpretation. In its undergoing feature, the experience of truth is the experience of an interpretation of meaning. It proposes that 1) there is truth, 2) one has experience of truth, 3) such experience is of an interpretive kind, and 4) hermeneutics is a theory not of truth but of the experience of truth.”⁵²⁵

The de-sacralising and weakening of Christianity fundamentally points towards the idea that “God is not the content of a true proposition but is actually someone increased

⁵²¹ Thomas G. Guarino, *Vattimo and Theology*, p. 65.

⁵²² Thomas G. Guarino, p. 66.

⁵²³ Brian Schroeder, “Introduction,” in *Between Nihilism and Politics: The Hermeneutics of Gianni Vattimo*, Eds., Silvia Benso and Brian Schroeder, New York: Sunny Press, 2010, pp. 1-14.

⁵²⁴ Brian Schroeder, pp. 1-14.

⁵²⁵ Gaetano Chiurazzi, “The Experiment of Nihilism: Interpretation and Experience of Truth in Gianni Vattimo,” in *Between Nihilism and Politics: The Hermeneutics of Gianni Vattimo*, eds., Silvia Benso and Brian Schroeder, New York: Sunny Press, 2010, pp. 16-32.

in Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is an exemplar of charity...God is a person who walks among us and left us an example of charity.” (CTWF, 48-49). The diffused and recovered nonreligious religion orients followers towards a dogma that does not rely on ‘truth claims’, but rather reasons of charity. Richard Kearney observes, “the truth that will make one free should be true because it frees one. If truth does not make you free, it is because there is no *caritas* in it...”⁵²⁶ Therefore, not only the reimagined form of post-modern religion, but also conventional traditional religions should strive towards a formulation of ‘truth’ that leads to mutual agreement, and friendship. The truth that is communalized generates the evolution of a community where religious enquirers have to compromise their individual positions to reach a collective understanding of truth. The community of ‘religious truth enquirers’ is possible when individuals give up their metaphysical truth claims, and adhere to communitarian truth claims. Guarino quotes Walter Kasper⁵²⁷ who echoes Vattimo’s thought and is influenced by the post-modern turn of religious pluralism and fraternity. “The most significant results of ecumenism in the last decades – and also the most gratifying – are not the various documents, but rediscovered fraternity: the fact that we have rediscovered one another...”⁵²⁸ Henceforth, the reintroduction of religious discourse in post-modernity is based not on ‘aggressive claims’ but on *fraternity*, and *caritas*; to which the major religions of the West show a positive orientation.

The traces of the hermeneutic of diffusion and the weakening of absolute truth claims can be perceived in most of the major religions of the world. In weakening itself, a particular religion should be able to ‘shun’ its traditional religious particularities. Vattimo rightly observes it from his Christian background; “I, too, define myself as Christian because I believe that Christianity is more ‘true’ than all other religions precisely on account of the fact that there is a sense in which *it is not a religion*...I personally am convinced that I do believe inasmuch as I strive to respect charity...” (CTWF, 52-53). Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) in his encyclicals emphasises the need to foster the hermeneutic of *caritas*. In his writings, he addresses the challenging task of clarifying the social and political significance of Christian

⁵²⁶ Richard Kearney, *Reimagining the Sacred*, p. 145.

⁵²⁷ Thomas Guarino quotes Walter Cardinal Kasper from his speech of November 23, 2007 in *Vattimo and Theology*, p. 66.

⁵²⁸ Thomas G. Guarino, p. 66.

charity.⁵²⁹ In *Deus Caritas Est*, Ratzinger contends that God's love for humanity is most profoundly revealed in Jesus' crucifixion, which is an event of God turning against God's self for the salvation of humanity. The response of this loving relationality is to create a network of loving communities, always open to others.⁵³⁰ *Caritas* envisioned here is the recognition of the transcendent value of each person, seeing in others, a uniqueness, and giving others the look of love for which they crave (*Deus Caritas Est*, 22). *Caritas in Veritate* insists that love is the principle of every type of human development; it also includes the macro-relationships of society, politics, economy, and environment.⁵³¹ Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia* observes that love co-exists with imperfection and is the companion of the weak. He says; "[W]e need a healthy dose of self-criticism... We have long thought that simply by stressing doctrinal and moral issues, without encouraging openness to grace, we provide sufficient support to human persons."⁵³² Rowan Williams in *God and Habits of Language* remarks that only at the point where language breaks down (dogmatic language) can we encounter God's true likeness.⁵³³ It is a pure form of *caritas*, where one gives place to God on earth and takes responsibility for God's appearing.⁵³⁴ It is giving shelter to a vulnerable divine presence, a giving life in all circumstance. These remarks suggest that *caritas* is central to the post-modern return of religion.

The eventual nature of 'truth', (its diffusion into the realm of ordinary experience) and the distinctiveness of a hermeneutic of *caritas* in reimagined religion, forms the core of my argument. *Caritas* takes precedence over truth. This proposition that *caritas* taking precedence over *veritas* is not targeted at theological or dogmatic truth claims. It resists the metaphysical violence of traditional truth claims replacing them with charity and dialogue. It initiates ethical 'precedence' not an aesthetic or logical precedence. It is an 'ethical precedence' because *caritas* can be described as a post-modern and weakened form of Kant's categorical imperative.⁵³⁵ The 'truthfulness' of

⁵²⁹ Mary Doak, "Love and Justice: Engaging Benedict XVI on Christian Discipleship in a Secular Age," in *At the Limits of the Secular: Reflections on Faith and Public Life*, Eds., William A. Barbieri Jr., Michigan/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014, pp. 250-274.

⁵³⁰ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005, 5.

⁵³¹ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, Vatican, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009, p. 2.

⁵³² Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Vatican: Vatican Press, 2015, pp. 36-37.

⁵³³ Nick Mattiske, (Book Review), Rowan Williams, "The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language," <http://www.biblesociety.org.au/news/like-river-review-edge-words-rowan-williams>, 15 February, 2015, accessed on 21/06/2016.

⁵³⁴ Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 321.

⁵³⁵ Matthew E. Harris, *Essays on Gianni Vattimo*, p. 105.

charity that takes precedence over the epistemological and metaphysical truth claims. The experience of truth here, becomes an interpretive dialogical charity. Though truth and love are theologically compatible; Nietzschean nihilism is the prelude to hermeneutical charity. *Caritas* taking precedence over truth can be seen as a hermeneutic of *Verwindung*, but not *Überwindung*, not a radical precedence over truth, but rather a healing, and remedying precedence. Metaphysical truth claims are healed and recuperated into a realm where truth becomes both experience and event. Taylor's use of 'new language' and the 'experience of love' (SA, 729) by individuals who have the experience of conversion can be equated with this experience of truth in *caritas*. This hermeneutic of *caritas* also can be considered as the result of 'language turn'. *Caritas* is the result of secularisation/*kenosis*; being so, *caritas* is the 'thought', 'feeling', or 'meaning' of *kenosis*. Whenever an individual self is able to disenchant itself from an absolute claim, there is an experience of *caritas*. *Caritas*, and the dialogical, experiential, and eventual nature of truth becomes the inner disposition of 'the disenchanted self' who has the freedom either to 'close' or 'open' himself/herself to the immanent frame in a reimagined nonreligious religion of post-modernity. Admittedly, it should also be acknowledged that there is a deep rooted ontological intertwining between truth and charity. Truth is sought, found, and expressed in charity; and charity is understood, confirmed, and practiced in the light of its own truth. Erick Meganck critiques the concept of truth as sustained and fostered by *caritas*. Meganck explains:

...*caritas* does not banish the notion of truth from philosophy. Truth in late-modernity has, however, left its transcendent and objectivist presumptions behind and becomes a truth that finds its validity in a historical socio-ethical immanence. *Caritas* is not a theoretical concept that describes a situation adequately and therefore will change whenever the situation changes. *Caritas* does not change with praxis, it is praxis. *Caritas* became visible in ethical thought, in pietas, and is therefore unable to rely on any theoretical scheme. *Caritas* can only stay true to itself by remaining loyal to the message of Christ, of love. To paraphrase Augustine: 'Love, and then say whatever you want.'⁵³⁶

Praxis and ethically oriented *caritas* in post-modernity should be understood as resembling the notion of truth that requires an interpretation for its appropriate meaning as an interpretation; an interpretation that brings in reciprocity and alterity. In its persistent feature, the experience of truth is the experience of an interpretation of meaning. Significantly, it should be noted that the hermeneutic of truth fostered by

⁵³⁶ Erick Meganck, "God Returns as Nihilist Caritas, Secularization According to Gianni Vattimo," pp. 363-379.

caritas in post-modernity is not the object of any hard-fought absolute knowledge but rather takes the form of an experience. “It is not the telos of a specific and methodological activity but rather that in which we are constantly immersed and that escapes our ability to mastery.”⁵³⁷ For Taylor, to be a Christian, is to have faith and an anticipatory confidence that one is “standing among others in a stream of *love* which that facet of God’s life we try to grasp, very inadequately” (SA, 701). If one can be inspired by such an experience of love in community, it can lead towards a much more powerful and effective healing action in history (SA, 703). The neopragmatism of Rorty and the communicative action of Habermas also note the proximity of truth to charity. “For both thinkers, no experience of truth can exist without some kind of participation in a community, and not necessarily the closed community (parish, province, or family) of the communitarians” (FR, 51). For Gadamer, truth comes as the ongoing construction of communities that coincides in a fusion of horizons, which has no inseparable “objective” limit... (FR, 51). As discussed in Chapter Four, the central role of the ‘Other’ in Levinas, the philosophy of communication in Habermas, and the theory of charity in Davidson also contribute to the centrality of the hermeneutic of *caritas*.

Admittedly, it should be noted that Vattimo’s Nietzschean nihilism and Heidegger’s *Ereignis* which make *caritas* the ultimate meaning of revelation, are not truly ultimate (B, 39). Accordingly, Harris observes; “[C]aritas is, not a moral absolute or transcendent principle, but it is the only limit of secularisation (AC, 48, ADG, 39).”⁵³⁸ It is this ‘limit’ or lack of there being an absolute *caritas* that enables nonreligious religious members to still speak of truth. Opinions, choices and values will become truth when they are shared in *caritas*. Each religion should move in a direction that further weakens its ethical code in favour of practical charity. This transformation towards further weakening and charity should eventually replace truth. Accordingly, “[T]he future of Christianity, and also of the church, is to become a religion of pure love, always more purified...Charity is the presence of God,” (ADG, 44-45).

Vattimo in his recent dialogue with Richard Kearney clarifies the precedence of charity over truth. He proposes a post-atheistic transcendence of God after God where charity should take precedence over truth, moving away from a God of metaphysical power

⁵³⁷ Gaetano Chiurazzi, “The Experiment of Nihilism: Interpretation and Experience of Truth in Gianni Vattimo,” pp.16-32.

⁵³⁸ Matthew E. Harris, *Essays on Gianni Vattimo*, p. 113.

and conceptual idolatry.⁵³⁹ He explains the role of charity in the nonreligious religion of God after God as follows: “[T]his love penetrates the soul of a believer that he/she is able to worship God exclusively in the form of service to others, not only without dogmas and holy offices but also without churches and rites, most of all without hierarchical divisions between clergy and layman...”⁵⁴⁰ Santiago Zabala in his criticism of the Catholic Church notes that the future of the Church as an institution in the twenty-first century necessitates a diffusion of all structural powers including the papacy. The Papacy should not be above the world, as the head of the church, but in the church as, in the words of Pope Gregory the Great, the “servant of the servants of God.”⁵⁴¹ The challenge of the future church will be to convince itself that charity must take pride of place, “looking at a map of faith without precepts and, most of all, without the image of a metaphysical God.”⁵⁴² (*FR*, 16). Vattimo and Zabala continue to observe that the truth that shall make you free (Jn 8:32) is not the objective truth of theology and natural sciences. The scriptural revelation contains no explanation of how God is made or how to save ourselves through knowledge of the truth. “The only truth that the Bible reveals to us is the practical appeal to love, to charity. The truth of Christianity is the dissolution of the metaphysical concept of truth itself” (*FR*, 14, 50-51). Vattimo observes that Christianity should recognize that the redemptive meaning of the Christian message makes its impact precisely by dissolving the claims of objectivity. The church must also finally heal the tension between truth and charity that has tormented it throughout its history (*FR*, 50).

The hermeneutic of charity taking precedence over truth relates to postmodern nihilism and the end of metanarratives. “It (suggests) a moving away from the sacral horizon of the beginnings” (*NE*, 31). It is a move which constituted the core of a secularised and weakened concept of the divine. It relates to salvation and emancipation from the strong structures of violent impositions and hierarchies. “As Nietzsche’s nihilism teaches, emancipation is brought about by the realization that “God is dead, and now

⁵³⁹ Richard Kearney and Charles Taylor, in “Transcendent Humanism in A Secular Age”, in *Reimagining the Sacred*, eds., Richard Kearney and Jens Zimmermann, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, pp. 76-92.

⁵⁴⁰ Richard Kearney and Gianni Vattimo, “Anatheism, Nihilism, and Weak Thought”, in *Reimagining the Sacred*, eds., Richard Kearney and Jens Zimmermann, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, pp. 128-148.

⁵⁴¹ Santiago Zabala, “Introduction: A Religion Without Theists or Atheists,” in *The Future of Religion: Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo*, ed., Santiago Zabala, New York/Chichester/West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2004, pp.1-28.

⁵⁴² Santiago Zabala, pp. 1-28.

we wish for many gods to live” (*NE*, xxvi). Therefore, hermeneutic nihilism and relativism of a constructive type is required to weigh the sustainability of the religion of post-modernity. This means that the hermeneutic of *caritas* assumes the truth of the reimagined returned religion of post-secular and post-modern Christianity. A postmodern nonreligious human, living with a ‘weak’ conception of truth, learns to live in his impermanency, able to practice solidarity and charity.

8.1.4 From Sacred to Secular: An Exodus and a Transition

The principal purpose of my research, as the title of the dissertation suggests, is to argue de-constructively that secularisation is an “Exodus and a Transition from Sacred to Secular.” Conventional secularist scholarship defends secularisation as an ongoing process of diffusion from the ‘sacred to the secular’. Relying on the accounts of Vattimo and Taylor, my account of secularisation contrasts with this understanding. With the help of Vattimo and Taylor, I suggest that the movement from ‘sacred to secular’ entails a movement from ‘sacred to a better/purified secular sacred’. One significant question is whether this process of secularisation is best thought of as an ‘exodus and a transition’.

To reach the conclusion of a non-religious religion, (the result of secularisation), Taylor asks “what does it mean to say that we live in a secular age?” The historical process of secularisation profoundly re-situates the place of religion in post-modernity. An individual self in a ‘secularised nonreligious society’ envisions his/her faith as ‘personal’, and not based on any metaphysical and dogmatic truth claims. Taylor offers a credible historical-genealogical analysis of the development of Western society, especially of those aspects of modernity which he calls ‘the immanent frame’. We have seen how the conversion from the ‘immanent frame’ or the shift into nonreligious religion is in fact not a single, but rather a continuous transformation, a series of new departures, in which earlier forms of religious life have been dissolved or destabilized into new ones both purified and refined. Consequently, today’s secular world is characterized not by an absence of religion, but by a continuing magnification of new options, religious, spiritual, (and anti-religious), which individuals and groups seize upon, in order to make sense of their lives and give shape to their spiritual aspirations. Prompted by Nietzsche and Heidegger, Vattimo deals with the question of history and the transition from modern to postmodern experience, - the so-called experience of the

end of history. He articulates this as the transition from ‘strong thinking’ to ‘weak thinking’. He admits a parallel between Western Christian tradition and the thinking of being, as *Ereignis*. If this relation is accepted, it creates a basis for philosophy and the assumption for a critical approach to religion, which ‘returns’ again in the post-metaphysical and post-modern epoch as ‘the religion of being for the other’.

Admittedly, both Vattimo and Taylor’s narrative of secularisation effects a paradigm shift in the conventional understanding of religion and secularism. Vattimo gives an account in which religious experience moves from transcendence to secularism, not in order to deny transcendence but to acknowledge it. It is a transition in that transcendence is shared in the immanent. For Taylor, there occurs an historical evolution of secularism, which is an intellectual evolution, in which historical religions undergo a transition through the social imaginaries, through cultural and political shifts in history, and by replacing the transcendental with personal religious experiences. A different grammar to their thinking can be observed here. For Vattimo, secularisation is a circular experience, an exodus, in which he himself is a participant. For Taylor, secularisation is a linear progress, a transition, to which he is only a witness or spectator. It transforms the transcendent and in so doing becomes available to the ordinary and secular. It is not in the transcendent being changed into the secular; but rather, the secular transforming the transcendent to yield truer religious experience, that secularisation becomes an inevitability. Religious experience is a fundamental aspect of human experience (unlike play), that continues to shape and guide human history. Hermeneutically, religious experience is a culturally and historically emergent phenomenon and not unlike politics and art, always refined by history. It is fundamentally an on-going process of improvement, change, and transition, shaped by its own concern.

In what way is ‘the paradigm shift’ that follows Vattimo and Taylor’s secular narrative, an ‘exodus’ and a ‘transition?’ The historical and hermeneutical process of secularisation from ‘sacred to secular’ (or ‘from sacred to a better understanding of sacred’) is both an exodus and a transition. The vein of this argument of exodus and transition is the hermeneutic of *Verwindung*. Primarily, exodus is “a situation in which many people leave a place at the same time.”⁵⁴³ According to Michael R. Collings, “exodus is an outward journey toward a new world, a new home...to reach

⁵⁴³ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/exodus>, accessed on 22/08/2016.

a final place to home before doubling back on itself to encompass changes throughout the universe. The journey entails a life-long series of crucial events, each testing, altering, strengthening the individual.”⁵⁴⁴ For Bloch (religious) exodus is both ontologically and determinately historically oriented towards the promise of a salvation that is always hidden from common life, as an obscure promise. He explains this as follows; “Instead of the finished goal there now appears a promised goal that must first be achieved; instead of the visible nature of God there appears an invisible God of righteousness and of the kingdom of righteousness.”⁵⁴⁵

‘Exodus’ is a situation, in which many people leave a particular place. It is an outward journey towards a new world in order to reach a new place. It encompasses changes throughout the world. There is always a hidden and at the same time promised goal in exodus. Exodus can be the ontological and historical ‘presentness’ of the individual self and the realm of sacred/God could be seen as the promise and futurity of the self. The hermeneutics of ‘the death of God’ and the *Verwindung* of metaphysics, (and thus the secularisation of dogmatic and objective truth claims) is in fact an exodus, a leaving behind of the metaphysical realms, coming to terms with the indelible promise of Christianity, and moving towards renewed reflection. One will never be able to return to where one started, because one experiences an unparalleled and an indelible promise of charity in this exodus. It is a constant process of transformation, during which one does not arrive at one’s pre-determined point. What is important is the dynamic of exodus, i.e., charity and the communalising truth experienced by dialogue. Setting out, journeying, and reaching the end are only techniques of the modality of exodus. What is important is the dynamic, the divine/sacred who himself, is the exodus. Both Vattimo and Taylor have an optimistic expectation of the dynamic of secularisation, though one will never be able to realise its promises entirely, but only through dialogical charity. Our spiritual pursuit is a constant struggle in which divinity is part (an invisible God of righteousness), a horizontal transcendence that we never attain but share in charity.

⁵⁴⁴ Michael R. Collings, *Towards Other Worlds: Perspectives on John Milton, C. S. Lewis, Stephen King, Orson Scott, and Others*, United Kingdom: Borgo Press, 2010, p. 267.

⁵⁴⁵ Chris Thornhill, “Utopian Emancipation: Bloch,” in *Edinburgh Encyclopedia of Continental Philosophy*, Ed., Simon Glendenning, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999, p. 485-487, and Chris quotes Ernest Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. N. and S. Plaice and P. Knight, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986, PP. 1233-4.

Secondly, transition means “a passage from one state, stage, subject, or place to another, or a movement, development, or evolution from one form, stage, or style to another.”⁵⁴⁶ According to Terry Pinkard, “to understand (an historical) transition, we must understand it as it was lived on the ‘inside’ by those living through it, and to understand what it was like on the ‘inside’ we must understand the forces and facts that were impinging on agents from the ‘outside’.”⁵⁴⁷ Evaluating Taylor’s narrative of secularisation and historical transition, Pinkard observes that this transition need not always be rational. This is due to the fact that the change from old beliefs to new always results in being asymmetrical, and partly due to the gradual destruction of the practices, the language, and the culture that sustained the earlier beliefs.⁵⁴⁸ Accordingly, for Taylor, ‘transition’ is an historical, genealogical, and linguistic process. It is not an organised but an irregular change in the earlier beliefs.

For William Bridges, transition means a gradual, extended, or unfinished change. However, to clearly appreciate the meaning of ‘transition’, it should be differentiated from the term ‘change’. “Change is situational: the reduction in the work force, the shift in the strategy, and the switch in reporting relationships are all changes.”⁵⁴⁹ Nonetheless, transition has a three-phase psychological reorientation process. Bridges explains:

It begins with an ending—with people letting go of their old reality and their old identity. Unless people can make a real ending, they will be unable to make a successful beginning. After the ending, people go into the second phase of transition, the neutral zone. This is a no-man’s land where people wander between two worlds. The neutral zone is a time and a state of being in which the old behaviours and attitudes die out, and people go dormant for a while as they prepare to move out in a new direction.⁵⁵⁰

Accordingly, ‘transition’ means ‘a passage from one stage/state to another’, and ‘a progressive evolution’.⁵⁵¹ A transition is an internal (inside) process of a system lived

⁵⁴⁶ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transition>, and <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/transition>, accessed on 23/08/2016.

⁵⁴⁷ Terry Pinkard, “Taylor, “History,” and the History of Philosophy,” in *Charles Taylor: Contemporary Philosophy in Focus*, Ed., Ruth Abbey, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 200.

⁵⁴⁸ Terry Pinkard, p. 201.

⁵⁴⁹ William Bridges, “Getting them through the Wilderness: A Leader’s Guide to Transition,” in *William Bridges and Associates: Resources for Organisations in Transition*, <http://www.wmbridges.com/pdf/getting-thru-wilderness-2006-v2.pdf>, accessed on 3/07/2016. Bridges concept of ‘transition’ is generally concerns economic changes and organisational crisis management and development. I use this to explain the process of secularisation in Vattimo and Taylor, as transition and exodus which bring in historical changes, and development in religious experience and the understanding of the sacred.

⁵⁵⁰ William Bridges, “Getting them through the Wilderness: A Leader’s Guide to Transition.”

⁵⁵¹ However, I acknowledge that there are also negative reforms leading to destruction and division, not re-discovery and construction.

and experienced by those inside, having compelling external influences and forces. Transition is always gradual, prolonged, and on-going without a specified culmination point. It begins with an end, the precondition for a successful beginning. There is also a neutral zone or no-man's land in every transition before moving into a new direction. Both for Taylor and Vattimo, there is no displacement of 'the hermeneutic of sacred' (change is associated with displacement) is no displacement, but only a transformation which implies continuity.

Taylor's deconstructive and hermeneutical re-reading of the medieval and modern history of Christianity as a narrative of secularisation enables a process of transition. As discussed in Chapter Six, Taylor's 'self' in the process of secularisation progressively transitional. The individual 'self' moves from one state/stage to another in a progressive evolution. The emergence of the 'secular self' as the 'porous self' (in the enchanted world), and 'buffered self' (in the disenchanted world) is 'cross pressured' in 'the immanent frame'. It finally must decide either to 'shut out' or 'break out' of the immanent frame. The 'internal' movement of 'the self' in secularisation is always influenced by forces external to it. The 'self' in the enchanted world was impinged upon by external forces of spirits, magic, and moral forces. The formation of 'the self-interpretability' and 'the embodiment' of the 'disenchanted self' is set in motion by the 'social imaginaries' and 'faith options' in 'the immanent frame' leading either to 'openness to conversion' or 'closure'. The Reform movements functioned as a 'tool' that assisted this transition of the 'self' through the centuries. First of all, Taylor's 'self-interpretive,' 'disengaged,' and 'moral and ethical' self's transition begins with 'end', with 'porousness' and 'enchantment.' Secondly, the self in transition is placed in a no-man's land of 'believing options' and in a 'nova effect.' Finally, the 'self' being 'cross pressured' in the 'nova effect' decides to 'close' or 'open' to conversion.

As for Vattimo, secularisation as an on-going exodus, channels the substantial link between the history of Christian revelation and the history of nihilism that helped to interpret the history of the West and re-engage with Christianity. This "paved the way for a conception of secularisation characteristic of modern Western history, as an event within Christianity linked positively to Jesus, and to a conception of history of (Western) modernity as a weakening and the dissolution of Being" (*B*, 40-41). Significantly, the hermeneutic of weakening itself is a process of transition in human

history; a transition of all strong structures and strong truth claims, to weak and charitable structures and relationships. Accordingly, in conclusion, I suggest that Vattimo's version of secularisation, (the hermeneutic of weak thought) is an exodus, which emphasises a departure from and a rethinking of the religious message of the West. This exodus liberates religion from metaphysics and leads to an anti-essentialist religion founded on kenotic-charity. Correspondingly, Taylor's account of secularisation (secularityⁱⁱⁱ), is a historical transition towards the formation of the secular self; a 'self' that enables the post-modern man to re-think and to re-invent the way in which religion and religious experience are imagined and lived.

Conclusion

Mark A. Wrathall writes; “[A]ny reflection on religion after metaphysics, needs to be understood in terms of thought about the place of religion in an age where the understanding of being that legitimised certain traditional modes of conceptualising the sacred and the divine is called into question.”⁵⁵² Vattimo and Taylor’s hermeneutic of secularism calls into question all traditional modes that conceptualise the sacred. Accordingly, the effects of *Verwindung* (of metaphysics and epistemology) and of the ‘death of God’, allow for re-engaging with religion and a return to religion in the specific sense defined in this research. The dialogical hermeneutics of Vattimo, Taylor, and their interlocutors enable ‘God to return from the death of God’. In this return, metaphysical ‘gods’ are no longer a necessity, and the individual self presupposes a renewed return of religion which can become the ground of a new faith. In the returned religion, one believes because one can believe, not because one must or is commanded to.⁵⁵³ Reality in the Nietzschean and Heideggerian sense is a ‘game of interpretation’ and ‘this particular interpretation itself’ cannot be claimed to be a pure and objective mirror of the world. The inexhaustibility of interpretation and the language turn open the possibility of a hermeneutics where different languages provide different language games. Dialogically each of these ‘games’ adds to the experiences of the ‘the post-secular’ mode of reality where ‘each game respect the boundaries of the other’. Accordingly, Taylor and Vattimo’s dialogical and non-foundationalist approach to Continental philosophy and their hermeneutical critique of metaphysics and modernity unmask the structures of the power in certain conceptions of the transcendent. This opens the way to an anti-essentialist religion founded on kenotic charity and being for the other.

Re-evaluation of religion and secularism interpreted as diffusion and *kenosis* (weakening and secularisation), tries to show the modern transformations in power, as formulations that increasingly weaken the absoluteness of the ‘sacred’ person’s sovereignty. In this process, modern subjectivity is also secularised (*B*, 42). Weak thought and secularisation work as ‘paradigm examples’ to explain the modern transformations in power. It includes the transition and dissolution of the power sectors

⁵⁵² Mark A. Wrathall, *Religion after Metaphysics*, p. 3.

⁵⁵³ Eduardo Mendieta, “Secularisation as a Post-Metaphysical Religious Vocation,” in *Between Nihilism and Politics: The Hermeneutics of Gianni Vattimo*, ed., Silvia Benso, and Brian Schroeder, New York: Sunny Press, 2010, pp. 149-166.

of ecclesiastical hierarchy, political dictatorship, patriarchal societies, etc. The secularised sacred envisions an authority and transcendence in dialogue and friendship with the other. Charity and dialogue become the norm of all religious, political and philosophical deliberations. The hermeneutic of charity and dialogue is further elaborated to include nature and the environment. “Hermeneutically speaking, there is always a “beyond” to interpretation, that is more interpretation.”⁵⁵⁴ The ‘beyond’ and inevitability of interpretation, furthers the futurity of the hermeneutic of the secularisation of Taylor and Vattimo. If so, secularisation (and religion re-imagined) has an inexhaustive role to play in post-modernity, post-secularity, and beyond. The ‘beyond’ of the hermeneutics of secularisation rescinds its boundaries outside human-history to encompass the whole of creation and ecology. This holistic ecological approach can be framed by the hermeneutic of *charity* and friendship.

Vattimo, presents *charity* as the end/limit of secularisation. Alternatively, Taylor does not foresee an end but seems to advocate the unending and inexhaustible transition of the hermeneutic of secularism. The individual ‘self’ who has ‘the fullness and conversion experience’ (according to Taylor) is drawn into his or her own choice of religion and spiritual life. This may involve meditation, or some charitable work, a study group, a pilgrimage, or some special form of prayer.⁵⁵⁵ The sacred in this ‘nonreligious religion’ includes the secular, though it is not of the secular. One cannot simply separate the two. The sacred is before us even before we are aware of it. “We do not cognize it but we re-cognize it.”⁵⁵⁶ The sacred is inside each other, and every organised religion should ‘secularise’ the ‘sacred’ to affirm ‘the everyday’ life of the human self. The sacred in nonreligious religion is always at distance and near; always departing and arriving; always a future possibility and a presentness. The search for and experience of the sacred is always an ‘exodus’ and a ‘transition’ for the self-interpreting self. It is a departure both from metaphysicalism and absolutism, and the Nietzschean ‘death of God’. Individuals in this anticipated post-modernity are not a-religious, un-religious or anti-religious but members of a ‘nonreligious’ religion in

⁵⁵⁴ Nicholas Davey, “Praxis and Impossibility of Hermeneutics? Reflections on Vattimo’s *Beyond Interpretation* and “The Future of Hermeneutics””, pp. 22-44.

⁵⁵⁵ Richard Kearney observes that this can take “the form of art of Botticelli, Bach, or Bob Dylan through theosophical New Age movements, astrological readings or, more recently, forms of transcendental meditation and Yoga – a mix of Rumi and Ramakrishna. All these forms of spiritual journeying and self-discovery can occur without any commitment to a denominational religious faith, with its inherited rites, creeds, practices and doctrines.” (Richard Kearney, *Reimagining the Sacred*, p. 15).

⁵⁵⁶ Richard Kearney, p. 15.

which ‘charity takes precedence over ‘the claims of truth’. Since there is no end to the process of the hermeneutic of ‘weakening’ and ‘secularisation’, the never-exhaustible future of religion and the sacred will be ever evolving.

Religion post-Vattimo and Taylor may well become a mode of hermeneutic being which forever unfolds itself through dialectic of faith and critique. The dialectic of faith and critique in an era of inexhaustible interpretation goes through a process of hermeneutic of assimilation and rejection. The process of ‘weakening’ and ‘secularisation’ strengthen possibility of more interpretation regarding religion and the secular. Here, the negation of religion in modernity moves to a hermeneutic of re-engaged of religion. The formal denial of religion through ‘a language’ itself dialectically and hermeneutically lead to the possibility of further transcendence. The language I use to deny means more than what I immediately mean, but the language implies more than what is literally implied, which is also true in the case of the hermeneutic of religion. My claim is that both Taylor and Vattimo’s hermeneutic of interpreting ‘secularism’ in its post-secular setting take them ‘beyond’ their own dialectic of secularism. Significantly, the hermeneutical, and existential outcome of this is the philosophical and ontological appropriation of the claim that ‘True Being never is, but sets itself on the path and sends itself, it trans-mits itself’ through the hermeneutic of interpretation, language and cultures. The eternal God exists through repetition, and repeats himself *ad infinitum* in language and interpretation. In the post-secular setting, the hermeneutic of ‘Being’ is an ‘event’ that occurs, repeats, and appropriates to itself. As a result, re-engagement with the sacred involves a process of transformation that leads to further transformations. Thus, the sacred maintains its transformational being.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Overview: As was stated at the very outset of this thesis, our concern has been in some respects to the journey of ‘the dark night of the soul’ in Western philosophy which articulates the most problematic relationship between the individual self and the transcendent reality. Our exploration of Vattimo and Taylor’s hermeneutics very much follows in this journey and transforms how it can be understood. Accordingly, with the help of their hermeneutics, this thesis offers a deconstructive analysis of religion and secularism. Their hermeneutics of secularism share an interest in and concern for the continued relevance of religion and transcendence. Therefore, I explored and compared a detailed analysis of both thinkers with regard to the philosophical and ethical emergence of modern secularism and how it leads to a hermeneutical re-engagement with the sacred. Their hermeneutics of *Verwindung*/secularisation/*kenosis* recover the possibility of religious experience, and at the same time, seek to reconstruct metaphysical and epistemological claims to certainty and truth. Though belonging to different schools of thought and using diverse approaches in developing their philosophy, they take seriously the significance of Christianity in shaping post-modernity. By going beyond convention, they offer an explanation of the meaning of secularity within the parameters of deconstruction, hermeneutics, and postmodernity. I employed their dialectical conception of secularity that re-evaluates the essential aspects of religion. This entails 1) a process of reflexive re-evaluation, 2) a re-evaluation of transcendentalism, and 3) a retrieval of the notion of transcendence. In addition, their dialectical discourse on religion exploits 4) the inexhaustible nature of religion, and its capacity to always be more than itself. My position derives not only from Vattimo and Taylor’s re-evaluation of secularism and religion but is also based on three basic claims. (1) Vattimo and Taylor’s concept of secularism opens up the possibility of a new non-metaphysical re-orientation towards transcendence and associated ethics. (2) Modern secularism emerges as incompatible with an orientation towards transcendence and religious diversity. (3) Re-engaged religion and secularism do not spell the death of conventional religion and ethics, but re-locates, re-invents, and re-forms them.

Research Summary and Response: Based on the principal claims above, this research analytically and deconstructively explained ‘the hermeneutics of secularism

and religion' of Vattimo and Taylor in Four Parts comprising of Eight Chapters. In Part One (Chapters One and Two), I made a systematic and logical clarification of the field of the research and outlined the historical relevance of the concepts of religion and secularism in the context of Vattimo and Taylor's hermeneutics of secularism. Vattimo's philosophy of 'weak thought', and 'secularisation' were explained in Part Two (Chapters Three and Four). As we saw, Vattimo's discussion raised the philosophical question that with regard to our first basic claim in philosophical and ontological appropriation, true Being never is but sets itself on the path and sends itself, it transmits itself. Therefore, the hermeneutic of Vattimo suggests that 'Being' is an 'event' that occurs, repeats, and appropriates to itself the dynamic of language and culture.

In Part Three (Chapters Five and Six), we presented Taylor's reflection on the 'formation of modern secular self' and 'secularity'. As examined with regard to our second basic claim, Taylor explains secularisation of religion as a self-critical process, not as something static but as something that evolves through stages of reflective self-appraisal. Concerning our third claim, his philosophical vocabulary used in this thesis helped to identify the tendency of religion to actualise transcendence in immanence. In conjunction with our fourth claim, through his hermeneutic of secularism, Taylor helps shape a vision of a world-historical progression from a deeply religious past to a secular but re-engaged religious future.

In Part Four (Chapters Seven and Eight), I provided both a comparative and dialogical exchange between Vattimo and Taylor, how they improve and advance on each other's positions, and finally a review of the leading arguments of the research. Finally, with regard to a fifth claim, this thesis argued that a postmodern philosophical perspective suggests that individuals practice their own post-modern version of 'free-lance' secular religion. This religion, having undergone the process of *Verwindung*/secularisation is not bound by dogmas and precepts but based on *kenosis* and *caritas*. The deconstruction of religion and secularism does not lead to destruction per se rather to reconstruction and the rebuilding of religious belief (hermeneutically), and secular culture. Thus, this thesis attempts to set in motion a new interpretation of religion by taking recourse to Vattimo and Taylor. In addition to the above semantics, I utilized both the axiom of 'the principle of hermeneutic excess' and 'the language

turn' to further investigate and to show that the basic claims of the thesis derive from the arguments of Vattimo and Taylor.

The Language Turn and Hermeneutic Excess: This thesis unveiled the inexhaustible continuity, the hermeneutical possibility, and rich implications of the language turn for the interpretation of religion. The inexhaustible interpretive possibilities of religion and 'God-talk' after Nietzsche become a philosophical paradigm on the basis of a language turn in Western philosophy. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche remarks, "I am afraid that we have not got rid of God because we still have faith on grammar..."⁵⁵⁷ Nicholas Davey comments, "Nietzsche's pronouncement of the death of God is the logical outcome of his repudiation of the apophantic aspects of philosophical language. However, Nietzsche's language of negation also reveals the disclosive (*aletheic*) capacity of expressive practices to operate independent of intentionality serving as an autonomous source of insight and revelation."⁵⁵⁸

Vattimo and Taylor exploit Heidegger's revelation of the revelatory power of world disclosure in *aletheic* language. No longer does a Hebrew God 'speak' through the Word, rather language becomes the divine-like gift of world revelation. For them, religion and the divine are 'experienced' in the eventual openings of our speech-created world. Their linguistic ontology, especially Vattimo's invocation of negative hermeneutics, helps to offer a hermeneutical reconstruction of re-engaging God and religion after the death of God and secularism. Vattimo writes' "I am thinking of a movement of taking leave, of distance, of the dissolution and weakening of reality... and which in my opinion philosophy can try to interpret only by taking it to

⁵⁵⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, "Reason in Philosophy", Section 5.

⁵⁵⁸ Nicholas Davey, Seminar, 2017. Davey explains the nuance of 'language turn' further; "This insight is made possible by the language turn in European philosophy which Nietzsche did much to facilitate. Nietzsche fails to see that his propositional denial of God does not settle the question of God.... The apophantic dimensions of his negation only succeeds ironically in re-positioning the question within the speculative dimensions of language itself. As a linguistic act, Nietzsche's apophantic denial of God unavoidably subverts its own negation by stimulating and affirming the world disclosive powers of language. The transcendent dimensions of our existence become apparent through the eventual openings of our speech-created world (*Sprachlichkeit*). Aletheic language is world-disclosive language. This both adds to our invocation of negative hermeneutics and suggests how Vattimo's post-modern reconstruction of religion draws heavily on this Heideggerian turn away from Nietzsche's negation of apophantic theology."

emancipatory outcomes.”⁵⁵⁹ Language ontology becomes the pre-requisite through which the divine is revealed, re-engaged and experienced. It involves a language movement, a weakening, a moving away from the absolute. In this sense, the Nietzschean ‘death of God’ argument undergoes a seminal epoch-making change within the philosophies of Vattimo and Taylor. They both ‘re-locate’ the question of God with their speculative thinking and the hermeneutics of language ontology. They re-think religion without metaphysicalism and dogma. Both Taylor and Vattimo provide rich material for engaging in wider cultural and philosophical deliberations on ‘post-secularism’ and the ‘return of religion’ with the help of ‘language ontology’. It means that the claims of religion need not be dealt with from a propositional perspective but also from a linguistic and experiential orientation. Thus, I argue for the post- modern and post-secular philosophical relevance of the hermeneutical reconstruction of religion and secularism.

Research Consequences: The philosophical relevance of the hermeneutical reconstruction of religion and secularism is as follows: (1) it poses a non-religious religion, 2) a religion of being-for-the-other, 3) the precedence of charity over truth, and 4) the hermeneutical process of sacred to secular considered as a transition and as exodus. Both the religion of ‘non- religious’ and the ‘being-for-the-other’ gives ‘precedence to charity’. The re-engaged religion in post-secularity renegotiates the secular and the sacred. They are mutually non-exclusive. ‘Exodus’ and ‘transition’ become the pre-condition of re-engaging God and religion so far these are continuous movements, an on-going process, a re-evaluation in which the divine appears and becomes. As we have seen, in this thesis, the conventional understanding of truth is re-examined and challenged by Vattimo and Taylor. Truth becomes de-metaphysicalised, weakened, and presented as an openness to the other. Truth is no longer institutionalised but charitable. It is a continuous transformative unfolding that is always in the process of re-evaluating itself. It does not postulate truth about ‘Being’; whereas it renders *caritas* truthful being. Accordingly, the concept of truth in this thesis can be defended against further de-construction. Truth conceived as charity resolves, re-engages and re-evaluates truth rather than de-constructs it.

⁵⁵⁹ Gianni Vattimo, *Of Reality: The Purpose of Philosophy*, trans., Robert T. Valgenti, New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, p. 14.

Such research outcome is also indicative of a postmodern philosophical and onto-theological re-engaging with religion in which individuals practise their own post-modern version of religion with full reflective consciousness. Vattimo argues that post-secularity is the outcome of the secularisation of Christianity. For him, the hermeneutic of *Verwindung* leads to a post-onto-theological religious experience of *caritas*. Taylor's secularism 'breaks the spell of the immanent frame' and leads to 'conversion and fullness'. Both resist the absoluteness of metaphysical and epistemological truth claims. Accordingly, for Vattimo and Taylor, the death of the metaphysical-moral God expedites the 'post-secular' possibility of a pluralistic vision of the world. The constituent essence of religion as re-engaged via 'the weak ontology' of Vattimo and 'the fullness and conversion' argument of Taylor is experienced as *caritas* and *agape*. Hermeneutically speaking, it means that the process of secularisation does not diminish the relevance of religion but relocates religion ontologically. It is a re-appropriation of religion from its denial, a recognition, a retrieval and re-activation. The hermeneutics of re-engagement, *caritas*, and the re-discovered sacred is existentially pluralistic, non-exclusive and praxis oriented in post-modernity.

Pluralism and Non-exclusivism: The irreversible return of religion as outlined by Vattimo and Taylor, answers the existential praxis-oriented questions raised in this research. Post-secular religious consciousness rethinks the constraints of time, place, hierarchies, absolutisms, and truth claims. It entails an *ana-theistic* worship. The believer returns to worshipping God after having participated in and having moved through the death of God. The worshipper worships 'spirit' and 'truth' as liberating and as transcending sacred-secular dichotomies. Hence, post-secular re-engagement with God is centred on the mutual non-exclusivity of formal religion and secularism.

The non-exclusive nature of re-engaged religion involves the complimentary relation between the secular and religious, religion and State, and the sacred and the profane. This complementarity entails a hermeneutic of plurality where 'the other' is recognised and their role in any ensuing dialogue appreciated. On the one hand 'weak thought' weakens whilst on the other hand a 'plural-generous' hermeneutic strengthens rationality as a reasonableness that is open to the other rather than pursuing the closed aims of institutionalised and instrumentalised reason. Post-metaphysical religion embraces a robust and reasonable openness to the plural. 'Giving space to the other'

is committing oneself to dialogically constituted truth. One achieves one's wholeness in dialogue with the other. For Richard Kearney, it is the hermeneutic of hospitality where loving and welcoming strangers becomes a sacrament of living in the world.⁵⁶⁰ Here the truth of the secular and religious complement each other. Plurality develops solidarity in the quest for truth. As was seen above, the re-imagined human person (the other) becomes an occasion of truth's emergence. It is not a truth sought in a particular transcendentalism within a religion, but a truth of tolerance and complementarity. The non-exclusivity and complementarity of religious and social life (a tolerant secular and religious society) has a positive value. Hermeneutical philosophy in reference to this dialogical social tendency, limits or de-universalises the claim to truth (either secular or religious). This hermeneutical view offers the basis of a pluralistic account of social and religious life.

An appeal to a cultural pluralism (Rowan Williams) which opposes secular efforts to exclude religion from 'the public square' frames religious experience in a praxis-oriented ontology. Nicholas Davey calls this non-exclusive society of complementarities, 'a community of the plural'.⁵⁶¹ In the community of the plural, the inevitable outcome of engagement is not brutal confrontation, but social, religious, and political involvement in dialogue. Such a pattern of social, political and ethical life, with much decentralised and co-operative activity, is in fact the living reality which is the church as conceived by Vattimo. Church or religious groups need no longer be considered as 'unreliable allies' for any political system. In this ethical vision, public civility and respect for diverse religious beliefs are guaranteed. The Church is no longer the spiritual guarantor of a political system but an individual constituent within the broad political franchise. However, according to Rowan Williams, a pluralistic society (a society where co-existence of religious groups, secular groups, and the democratic state are envisioned), cannot exist without difficulty and challenge. "Argument is essential to a functioning democratic state, and religion should be involved in this, not constantly demanding the right not to be offended."⁵⁶² This ethic requires a strong common culture of ordinary courtesy and respect.

⁵⁶⁰ Richard Kearney and Gianni Vattimo, "Anatheism, Nihilism, and Weak Thought", pp. 129-148.

⁵⁶¹ Nicholas Davey, "Towards a Community of the Plural: Philosophical Pluralism, Hermeneutics and Practice," pp. 88-102.

⁵⁶² Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 4.

Possible Criticisms: The invaluable contributions of Vattimo and Taylor towards achieving a post-secular re-engagement of religion are not without their difficulties. Their ‘non-foundationalist ontology’ is prone to criticism. Taylor admits that his ‘master narrative’ depends on ‘Reform’, Providential Deism’ and the ‘Modern Moral Order’ as ‘a background for his intellectual story-telling’ about secularisation. However, he fails to recognise that the cultural, and religious identity of “medieval Europe was shaped by its protracted encounter with Islam.”⁵⁶³ As explained, this criticism shows that Taylor’s ‘narrative of secularism’ is limited in scope and fails to take note of other sources of secularity in history. As David Storey notes, “Taylor’s hermeneutical approach makes war on the very idea of an objective history, yet still relies heavily on what, in the end, we do want to call concrete historical facts.”⁵⁶⁴ Taylor’s notions of the nova effect, and of ‘the age of authenticity’ is hardly applicable to contemporary European society or elsewhere in Islamic or Hindu countries.⁵⁶⁵ Taylor can be criticised for narrowing down the scope of his ‘post-secularity’ exclusively to Europe and the United States. As Casanova comments, Taylor’s account of secularity fails to consider the crucial significance of the colonial encounter in European development. Taylor fails to take on board his master narrative and his genealogical account of colonial and inter-civilisational encounters. It is very regrettable that Taylor limits his account of secularism to his own religious background. His narrative would have given more universal credibility if he had included other non- Christian traditions to strengthen his argument. It might have been his personal faith that restrained him to be broad-minded in his secular narrative. This is particularly evident in his not acknowledging other civilizations in political, existential and epistemological terms. Hence, Taylor fails to present a post-secular age that transcends all territorial civilisational boundaries.⁵⁶⁶ Taylor’s concept of secularism is provisional and open. He admits that his ‘secularity’ needs to be

⁵⁶³ David Storey, “Charles Taylor’s Secular Age: Breaking the Spell of the Immanent Frame”, pp. 179-218.

⁵⁶⁴ David Storey, p. 203.

⁵⁶⁵ Jose Casanova, “A Secular Age: Dawn or Twilight”, pp. 265-281.

⁵⁶⁶ By “All territorial civilisational boundaries” I mean the civilizations outside the West to which Taylor’s notion of secularism is limited.

complimented by other accounts and approaches, and in the process, both amended and altered.⁵⁶⁷

Vattimo, on the other hand, has also attracted criticism from Frederiek Depoortere, Thomas G. Guarino, and Matthew E. Harris. First of all, Depoortere expresses his concern regarding Vattimo's appeal to Heidegger and Nietzsche in defending nihilism. Depoortere notes that Heidegger and Nietzsche in fact "have moved beyond nihilism" and "it is doubtful whether it is correct to engage Nietzsche in order to defend a nihilistic pluralism as Vattimo does."⁵⁶⁸ Vattimo's violent metaphysics needs to be criticised. We must view with suspicion the claim that transcendence is violent by definition. Is it possible that there can be metaphysics without violence, and a sacredness without violence? Hence, it should be noted that Vattimo's version of Christianity is a very limited one. First of all, religion (Christianity) is not all about strong truth claims and violence. Religion also portrays features like love, empathy, other-centeredness, morality, the sacramental, preaching, and liturgy. None of these elements have been taken into deep philosophical consideration by him. Secondly, he makes limited use of the scripture passages (John 15:15 and Philippians 2:7). He reads them in isolation; gives a literal hermeneutical explanation and takes into account only half of the Christological hymn found in Philippians 2. Thomas Guarino criticises Vattimo's *Verwindung* of Christianity as having "gnostic proclivities". He observes' "for virtually every key term in the Christian mystery is profoundly reinterpreted, treated as an old wineskin to be filled with, and indeed ruptured by, a new and alien vintage."⁵⁶⁹ It is an obvious weakness of 'weak ontology' that it limits the precepts of faith to the withering confines of an ailing reason. His commitment to horizontal transcendence rules out the possibility of a vertically transcendent God.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁷ Charles Taylor, "Afterword" in *Working with a Secular Age: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Charles Taylor's Master Narrative*, eds., Florian Zemmin, Colin Jager, and Guido Vanheeswijck, Boston/Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2016, pp. 369-384.

⁵⁶⁸ Frederiek Depoortere, *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy*, p. 18. Depoortere quotes Theo de Wit, saying "Nietzsche rejects such a pluralism and the great challenge faced by the *Übermensch* is precisely to overcome." (Theo W. A. de Wit, "The Return to Religion: Vattimo's Reconciliation of Christian Faith and Postmodern Philosophy", in *Bijdragen* 61/4, 2000, pp. 390-411.)

⁵⁶⁹ Thomas Guarino, *Vattimo and Theology*, p. 152.

⁵⁷⁰ I am not putting up an argument opposing to the 'horizontal transcendence' of Vattimo but try to state that Vattimo can be criticised for underplaying the conventional understanding of transcendence as vertical.

The limitations of Vattimo and Taylor's hermeneutics of religion and secularism restrict my thesis to the criticisms of nihilism, relativism, and pluralism. The basic approach used in this thesis is deconstruction and hermeneutics. In my opinion, my research findings cannot be verified quantitatively or empirically.⁵⁷¹ Non-religious religion, religion of being-for-the-other, and charity taking precedence over truth are existential occurrences in a post-secular age, not objects subject to factual verification. What I have proposed is a framework of thinking about God, the transcendent and the secular which is a clear and consistent logical outcome of a deconstructive approach.

Moving Beyond: Regardless of these criticisms, with the help of Vattimo and Taylor's hermeneutics of the deconstruction of religion and secularism, I propose a 'never-having-gone-away-character of religion' which is at the basis of post-secular age religious experience.

As discussed, their hermeneutics of *Verwindung*/secularisation/*kenosis* recover the possibility of religious experience. However, the revival of religion has been exhibited more in fundamentalist movements, and ethno-religious conflicts. The return of religion in contemporary philosophy described as post-secular or post-modern return is characterised first of all at its core by a deep tolerance for difference and otherness. However, there are examples where certain migration-driven communities and certain religions drift away from the characteristic features of post-secular re-engagement of religion. These lead to metaphysically violent fanaticism and nationalism.

I argue that to arrive at a belief in God in a post-secular era is infinitely more likely to be an outcome of whatever prompts one to let go of unhelpful doctrinal fictions. These fictions may include both mythic and transcendent control, namely, the notions that one 'owns' one's body (genetic engineering), one's world and earth (economy and ecology), one's future (ethics and religion) and such like. Letting-go opens up the possibility of such fictions taking responsibility for meaningful action that announces the presence of a fundamental giving on which the world subsists. This includes both non-exclusivity and complementarity as against exclusivism and opposition between religions, the secular state, and the environment. It also entails taking responsibility for the other, for an ethical code, a global economic policy providing equal distribution

⁵⁷¹ It is true that the research outcome cannot be quantitatively verified, but in a sense, it can be empirically verified in relation to the material the research uncovered.

of the natural resources, environmental laws to protect mother earth, and democratic governance where state and religion do not require to bargain for either's rights.

Religion re-engaged in post-secularity is a reaction to dogmatist claims to truth no matter the quarter from which they emerge. Whether found in newspapers, the message of a political party, an academic journal or a pulpit, such claims can promote arrogance and smugness. Significantly, the death of God theology presents itself as a critical and prophetic voice in the midst of a culture and faith in crisis. The hermeneutic of 'overcoming metaphysics' helps to move away from old religious certainties and assures a move towards a transformed religious sensibility. Vattimo and Taylor's thoughts legitimately seek to respond to the rise in extremism, fundamentalism, and global animosity⁵⁷² Vattimo and Taylor stand as the representative voices of distinct, though profoundly interrelated modes of thinking through, and thinking about, the relation of religion to society and the continued possibility of theological thinking. Through their distinctive narratives of secularisation, Vattimo and Taylor offer prescient tools for the analysis of "an emergent religious and cultural sensibility that (is) now forced to pick up the broken pieces and to imagine, if not craft an alternative future" (*ADG*, 8).

Conclusion: My thesis defends the following:

1. Thinking through the logic of secularity creates the conditions through which contemporary secularity is conceptualized and is transformed into new nuances through the secular narratives of Vattimo and Taylor.

2. Modern secularism gives rise to charity/*caritas* and is not incommensurable with transcendence but articulates it as a way of being open to the other.

Therefore, the significance of my argument is that it dismisses the conventional perception and myth that secular modernity represents the historical legacy of the termination of both God-talk, and religion after the death of God. The hermeneutical deconstruction of religion and secularism with its paradigms of inexhaustible interpretation, the implication of its language turn, and the 'inventiveness' of truth paradoxically promote the resurgence of religion through its own weakening and secularisation. The post-secular in this 'return' is "re-routing the transcendence away

⁵⁷² Thomas Guarino, *Vattimo and Theology*, p. 65.

from alterity towards the practices of daily and human life.”⁵⁷³ Hence, ‘a hermeneutic of inexhaustible interpretation’ and ‘the ontologisation of the word’ enable the principle of the non-exclusivity of religion and secularism to further advance its possible orientations in post-secularity and post-modernity. These hermeneutical orientations include, (1) a post-secular religious practice including inter-religious dialogue, (2) environmental and universal policy making, and, (3) politics and the universal other.

⁵⁷³ Enda McCaffrey, *The Return of Religion in France*, p. 249.

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GLOSSARY

The following Glossary provides an explanatory list of several technical terms and phrases with unique philosophical meanings, which are frequently used by Gianni Vattimo and Charles Taylor.

Gianni Vattimo:

1. ***Caritas***: Vattimo interprets this concept through his theory of ‘weak thought’. *Caritas* is the force driving secularisation, and the limit of secularisation. It is the application of the message of the *kenosis* of God through the interpretative act. *Kenosis* is the message of the weakening of God, and *caritas* is the message of weakening as a categorical imperative.
2. ***Kenosis***: Kenosis is the central message of the New Testament, and in Vattimo’s understanding *kenosis* is God’s love shown through the message of weakening. Through the hermeneutic of *kenosis*, the Christian God sheds more and more of his traditional metaphysical properties, bringing forth the final truth of Christianity (*B*, 46-48, Philippians 2:5-7).
3. ***Koiné***: *Koiné* is a dialect or language of a region that has become the common or standard language of a larger area or region.
4. ***Verwindung***: The *Verwindung* of the metaphysical tradition is a recovery from, recuperation, convalescence and a resignation to metaphysics and its strong notion of ‘Being.’
5. ***Überwindung***: ‘overcoming,’ which implies a transition from one phase or moment to another ‘higher’ one in a given process, and it is radical overcoming of metaphysics.
6. **Weak Thought**: ‘weak thought’ is understood not as “the idea of thinking that is more aware of its own limits, that abandons its claims to global and metaphysical visions, but above all a theory of weakening as the constitutive character of Being in the epoch of the end of metaphysics” (*B*, 35).

Charles Taylor*:

7. **Age of Authenticity (AA):** Post 1960's age in which spirituality is de-institutionalised and is understood primarily as an expression of "what speaks to me." Reflective of *Expressive Individualism*.

8. **Age of Mobilisation (AM):** The Political Order is no longer divinely instituted; rather, it is our task to construct political order in conformity to God's law/design. Roughly 1800-1960.

9. **Ancien regime (AR):** One of Taylor's 'types' of religious identity, the ancient and medieval ordering which tied religious identity to political identity. E.g., the king is divinely appointed.

10. **Buffered Self:** In the modern social imaginary, the self is in a way insulated in an interior 'mind,' no longer vulnerable to the transcendent or the demonic. Contrast with the *porous self*.

11. **Closed World Structures (CWSs):** Aspects of our contemporary experience that 'tip' the immanent frame toward a closed construal. See also spin, and take.

12. **Cross-pressure:** The simultaneous pressure of various spiritual options; or the feeling of being caught between an echo of transcendence and the drive toward immanentisation. Produces the nova effect.

13. **Excarnation:** The process by which religion (and Christianity in particular) is de-ritualised, turned into a 'belief system.' Contra incarnational, sacramental spirituality.

14. **Exclusive Humanism:** A World view or social imaginary that is able to account for meaning and significance without any appeal to the divine or transcendence.

15. **Expressive Individualism:** Emerging from the Romantic expressivism of the late eighteenth century, it is an understanding 'that each one of us has his/her own way of realising our humanity,' and that we are called to live that out ('express it') rather than conform to models imposed by others (especially institutions). See also age of authenticity).

16. **Fragilisation:** In the face of different options, whereby people who lead 'normal' lives do not share my faith (and perhaps believe something very different), my own faith commitment becomes fragile- put into question, dubitable

17. **Fullness:** A term meant to capture the human impulse to find significance, meaning, value – even if entirely within the immanent frame.
18. **Immanent Frame:** A structured social space that frames our lives entirely within a natural (rather than supernatural) order. It is the circumscribed space of the modern social imaginary that precludes transcendence. See also immanentisation.
19. **Immanentisation:** The process whereby meaning, significance, and ‘fullness’ are sought within an enclosed, self-sufficient, naturalistic universe without any reference to transcendence. A kind of ‘enclosure.’
20. **Modern Moral Order (MMO):** A new understanding of morality that focuses on the organisation of society for mutual benefit rather than an obligation to ‘higher’ or eternal norms. Thus, the ‘moral’ is bound up with (and perhaps reduced to) the ‘economic.’
21. **Nova Effect:** The explosion of different options for belief and meaning in a secular age, produced by the concurrent ‘cross-pressures’ of our history – as well as the concurrent pressure of immanentisation and (at least echoes of) transcendence.
22. **Porous Self:** In the ancient/medieval social imaginary, the self is open and vulnerable to the enchanted ‘outside’ world – susceptible to grace, possession. Contrasts with buffered self.
23. **Reform:** Taylor’s umbrella term for a variety of late medieval and early modern movements that were trying to deal with the tension between the requirements of eternal life and the demands of domestic life. A response to ‘two-tiered’ religion.
24. **Seculari:** A more ‘classical’ definition of the secular, as distinguished from the sacred – the earthly plane of domestic life.
25. **Secularii:** More ‘modern’ definition of the secular as a-religious – neutral, unbiased, ‘objective’ – as in a ‘secular’ public square.
26. **Seculariii:** Taylor’s notion of the secular as an age of contested belief, where religious belief is no longer axiomatic. It is possible to imagine not believing in God. See also exclusive humanism.

27. **Secularism:** A doctrine associated with secularii that pushes for public institutions (schools, government, etc.) to be a-religious. Roughly equivalent to the French doctrine of *laïcité* and often expressed in terms of the ‘separation of church and State.’

28. **Secularisation:** Secularisation is the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domain of religious institutions and symbols.

29. **Secularity:** Secularity is the state of being separate from religion, or of not being exclusively allied with or against any particular religion.

30. **Social Imaginary:** Differs from an intellectual system or framework, “broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode.” A social imaginary is “the way ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in the theoretical terms, it is carried in images, stories, legends, etc.” (SA, 171-72).

31. **Spin:** A construal of life within the immanent frame that does not recognise itself as a construal and thus has no room to grant plausibility to the alternative. Can be either ‘closed’ (immanentist) or ‘open’ (transcendence). See also take.

32. **Subtraction Stories:** Accounts that explain ‘the secular’ as merely the subtraction of religious belief, as if the secular is what is left over after we subtract superstition. In contrast, Taylor emphasises that the secular is produced, not just distilled.

33. **Take:** A construal of life within the immanent frame that is open to appreciating the viability of other takes. Can be either ‘closed’ (immanentist) or ‘open’ (transcendence). See also ‘spin’.

* The glossary from Charles Taylor’s works are taken from James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*, pp. 140-143.